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RAVENSHOE

VOL. II.

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RAVENSHOE

BY
HENRY KINGSLEY

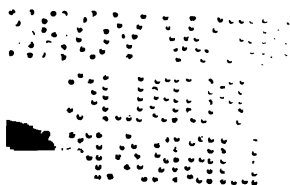
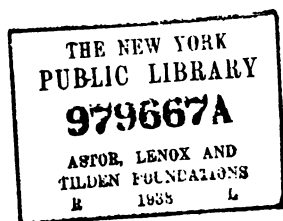
IN TWO VOLUMES

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RAVENSHOE

Chapter I

Lord Welter's Ménage

THERE was a time, a time we have seen, when Lord Welter was a merry, humorous, thoughtless boy. A boy, one would have said, with as little real mischief in him as might be. He might have made a decent member of society, who knows? But, to do him justice, he had had everything against him from his earliest childhood. He had never known what a mother was, or a sister. His earliest companions were grooms and gamekeepers; and his religious instruction was got mostly from his grandmother, whose old-fashioned Sunday-morning lectures and collect learnings, so rigidly pursued that he dreaded Sunday of all days in the week, were succeeded by cock-fighting in the Croft with his father in the afternoon, and lounging away the evening among the stable-boys. As Lord Saltire once said, in a former part of this story, "Ranford was what the young men of the day called an uncommon fast house."

Fast enough, in truth. "All downhill and no drag on." Welter soon defied his grandmother. For his father he cared nothing. Lord Ascot was so foolishly fond of the boy that he never contradicted him in anything, and used even to laugh when he was impudent to his grandmother, whom, to do Lord Ascot justice, he respected more than any living woman. Tutors were tried, of whom Welter, by a happy combination of obstinacy and recklessness,

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managed to vanquish three, in as many months. It was hopeless. Lord Ascot would not hear of his going to school. He was his only boy, his darling. He could not part with him ; and, when Lady Ascot pressed the matter, he grew obstinate, as he could at times, and said he would not. The boy would do well enough ; he had been just like him at his age, and look at him now !

Lord Ascot was mistaken ! He had not been quite like Lord Welter at his age. He had been a very quiet sort of boy indeed. Lord Ascot was a great stickler for blood in horses, and understood such things. I wonder he could not have seen the difference between the sweet, loving face of his mother, capable of violent, furious passion though it was, and that of his coarse, stupid, handsome, gipsy-looking wife, and judged accordingly. He had engrafted a new strain of blood on the old Staunton stock, and was to reap the consequences.

What was to become of Lord Welter was a great problem, still unsolved ; when, one night, shortly before Charles paid his first visit to Ranford, vice Cuthbert, disapproved of, Lord Ascot came up, as his custom was, into his mother's dressing-room, to have half-an-hour's chat with her before she went to bed.

" I wonder, mother dear," he said, " whether I ought to ask old Saltire again, or not ? He wouldn't come last time, you know. If I thought he wouldn't come, I'd ask him."

" You must ask him," said Lady Ascot, brushing her grey hair, " and he will come ?"

" *Very* well," said Lord Ascot. " It's a bore ; but you must have some one to flirt with, I suppose."

Lady Ascot laughed. In fact, she had written before, and told him that he *must* come, for she wanted him ; and come he did.

" Now, Maria," said Lord Saltire, on the first night, as soon as he and Lady Ascot were seated together on a quiet sofa, " what is it ? Why have you brought me down to meet this mob of jockeys and gamekeepers ? A fort-

Lord Welter's Ménage

night here, and not a soul to speak to, but Mainwaring and yourself. After I was here last time, dear old Lady Hainault croaked out in a large crowd that some one smelt of the stable."

"Dear old soul," said Lady Ascot. "What a charming, delicate wit she has. You will have to come here again, though. Every year, mind."

"Kismet," said Lord Saltire. "But what is the matter?"

"What do you think of Ascot's boy?"

"Oh, Lord!" said Lord Saltire. "So I have been brought all this way to be consulted about a schoolboy. Well, I think he looks an atrocious young cub, as like his dear mamma as he can be. I always used to expect that she would call me a pretty gentleman, and want to tell my fortune."

Lady Ascot smiled: *she* knew her man. She knew he would have died for her and hers.

"He is getting very troublesome," said Lady Ascot. "What would you reco —"

"Send him to Eton," said Lord Saltire.

"But he is very high-spirited, James, and —"

"*Send him to Eton.* Do you hear, Maria?"

"But Ascot won't let him go," said Lady Ascot.

"Oh, he won't, won't he?" said Lord Saltire. "Now, let us hear no more of the cub, but have our picquet in peace."

The next morning Lord Saltire had an interview with Lord Ascot, and two hours afterwards it was known that Lord Welter was to go to Eton at once.

And so, when Lord Welter met Charles at Twyford, he told him of it.

At Eton, he had rapidly found other boys brought up with the same tastes as himself, and with these he consorted. A rapid interchange of experiences went on among these young gentlemen; which ended in Lord Welter, at all events, being irreclaimably vicious.

Lord Welter had fallen in love with Charles, as boys

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do, and their friendship had lasted on, waning as it went, till they permanently met again at Oxford. There, though their intimacy was as close as ever, the old love died out, for a time, amidst riot and debauchery. Charles had some sort of a creed about women; Lord Welter had none. Charles drew a line at a certain point, low down it might be, which he never passed; Welter set no bounds anywhere. What Lord Hainault said of him at Tattersall's was true. One day, when they had been arguing on this point rather sharply, Charles said —

“If you mean what you say, you are not fit to come into a gentleman's house. But you don't mean it, old cock; so don't be an ass.”

He did mean it, and Charles was right. Alas! that ever he should have come to Ravenshoe!

Lord Welter had lived so long in the house with Adelaide that he never thought of making love to her. They used to quarrel, like Benedict and Beatrice. What happened was her fault. She was worthless. Worthless. Let us have done with it. I can expand over Lord Saltaire and Lady Ascot, and such good people, but I cannot over her, more than is necessary.

Two things Lord Welter was very fond of — brawling and dicing. He was an arrant bully; very strong, and perfect in the use of his fists, and of such courage and tenacity that, having once begun a brawl, no one had ever made him leave it, save as an unqualified victor. This was getting well known now. Since he had left Oxford and had been living in London, he had been engaged in two or three personal encounters in the terribly fast society to which he had betaken himself, and men were getting afraid of him. Another thing was, that, drink as he would, he never played the worse for it. He was a lucky player. Sometimes, after winning money of a man, he would ask him home to have his revenge. That man generally went again and again to Lord Welter's house, in St. John's Wood, and did not find himself any the richer. It was the

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most beautiful little gambling den in London, and it was presided over by one of the most beautiful, witty, fascinating women ever seen. A woman with whom all the men fell in love ; so staid, so respectable, and charmingly behaved. Lord Welter always used to call her Lady Welter ; so they all called her Lady Welter too, and treated her as though she were.

But this Lady Welter was soon to be dethroned to make room for Adelaide. A day or two before they went off together, this poor woman got a note from Welter to tell her to prepare for a new mistress. It was no blow to her. He had prepared her for it for some time. There might have been tears, wild tears, in private ; but what cared he for the tears of such an one ? When Lord Welter and Adelaide came home, and Adelaide came with him into the hall, she advanced towards her, dressed as a waiting-woman, and said quietly,

“ You are welcome home, madam.”

It was Ellen, and Lord Welter was the delinquent, as you have guessed already. When she fled from Ravenshoe, she was flying from the anger of her supposed brother William ; for she thought he knew all about it ; and, when Charles and Marston saw her passing round the cliff, she was making her weary way on foot towards Exeter to join him in London. After she was missed, William had written to Lord Welter, earnestly begging him to tell him if he had heard of her. And Welter had written back to him that he knew nothing, on his honour. Alas for Welter's honour, and William's folly in believing him !

Poor Ellen ! Lord Welter had thought that she would have left the house, and had good reason for thinking so. But, when he got home, there she was. All her finery cast away, dressed plainly and quietly. And there she stayed, waiting on Adelaide, demure and quiet as a waiting-woman should be. Adelaide had never been to Ravenshoe, and did not know her. Lord Welter had calculated on her going ; but she stayed on. Why ?

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You must bear with me, indeed you must, at such times as these. I touch as lightly as I can ; but I have undertaken to tell a story, and I must tell it. These things are going on about us, and we try to ignore them, till they are thrust rudely upon us, as they are twenty times a year. No English story about young men could be complete without bringing in subjects which some may think best left alone. Let us comfort ourselves with one great, undeniable fact, — the immense improvement in morals which has taken place in the last ten years. The very outcry which is now raised against such relations shows plainly one thing at least — that undeniable facts are being winked at no longer, and that some reform is coming. Every younger son who can command 200*l.* a year ought to be allowed to marry in his own rank in life, whatever that may be. They will be uncomfortable, and have to save and push ; and a very good thing for them. They won't lose caste. There are some things worse than mere discomfort. Let us look at bare facts, which no one dare deny. There is in the great world, and the upper middle-class world too, a crowd of cadets ; younger sons, clerks, officers in the army, and so on ; non-marrying men, as the slang goes, who are asked out to dine and dance with girls who are their equals in rank, and who have every opportunity of falling in love with them. And yet if one of this numerous crowd were to dare to fall in love with, and to propose to, one of these girls, he would be denied the house. It is the fathers and mothers who are to blame, to a great extent, for the very connexions they denounce so loudly. But yet the very outcry they are raising against these connexions is a hopeful sign.

Lieutenant Hornby, walking up and down the earth to see what mischief he could get into, had done a smart stroke of business in that way, by making the acquaintance of Lord Welter at a gambling-house. Hornby was a very good fellow. He had two great pleasures in life. One, I am happy to say, was soldiering, at which he worked like

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a horse, and the other, I am very sorry to say, was gambling, at which he worked a great deal harder than he should. He was a marked man among professional players. Every one knew how awfully rich he was, and every one in succession had a "shy" at him. He was not at all particular. He would accept a battle with any one. Gaming men did all sorts of dirty things to get introduced to him, and play with him. The greater number of them had their wicked will ; but the worst of it was, that he always won. Sometimes, at a game of chance, he might lose enough to encourage his enemies to go on ; but at games of skill no one could touch him. His billiard playing was simply masterly. And Dick Ferrers will tell you, that he and Hornby, being once, I am very sorry to say, together at G — n — ch F — r, were accosted in the park by a skittle-sharper, and that Hornby (who would, like Faust, have played chess with Old Gooseberry) allowed himself to be taken into a skittle-ground, from which he came out in half an hour victorious over the skittle-sharper, beating him easily.

In the heyday of his fame Lord Welter was told of him, and saying, "Give me the daggers," got introduced to him. They had a tournament at *écarté*, or billiards, or something or another of that sort, it don't matter ; and Lord Welter asked him up to St. John's Wood, where he saw Ellen.

He lost that night liberally, as he could afford to ; and, with very little persuasion, was induced to come there the next. He lost liberally again. He had fallen in love with Ellen.

Lord Welter saw it, and made use of it as a bait to draw on Hornby to play. Ellen's presence was, of course, a great attraction to him, and he came and played ; but unluckily for Lord Welter, after a few nights his luck changed, or he took more care, and he began to win again ; so much so that, about the time when Adelaide came home, my Lord Welter had had nearly enough

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of Lieutenant Hornby, and was in hopes that he should have got rid of Ellen and him together ; for his lordship was no fool about some things, and saw plainly this—that Hornby was passionately fond of Ellen, and, moreover, that poor Ellen had fallen deeply in love with Hornby.

So, when he came home, he was surprised and angry to find her there. She would not go. She would stay and wait on Adelaide. She had been asked to go ; but had refused sharply the man she loved. Poor girl, she had her reasons ; and we shall see what they were. Now you know what I meant when I wondered whether or no Charles would have burnt Hornby's house down if he had known all. But you will be rather inclined to forgive Hornby presently, as Charles did when he came to know everything.

But the consequence of Ellen's staying on as a servant to Adelaide brought this with it, that Hornby determined that he would have the *entrée* of the house in St. John's Wood, at any price. Lord Welter guessed this, and guessed that Hornby would be inclined to lose a little money in order to gain it. When he brushed Charles's knee in Piccadilly he was deliberating whether or no he should ask him back there again. As he stood unconsciously, almost touching Charles, he came to the determination that he would try what bargain he could make with the honour of Charles's sister, whom he had so shamefully injured already. And Charles saw them make the appointment together in the balcony. How little he guessed for what !

Lord Hainault was right. Welter was a scoundrel. But Hornby was not, as we shall see.

Hornby loved play for play's sake. And, extravagant dandy though he was, the attorney blood of his father came out sometimes so strong in him that, although he would have paid any price to be near, and speak to Ellen, yet he could not help winning, to Lord Welter's great dis-

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gust, and his own great amusement. Their game, I believe, was generally *piquet* or *écarté*, and at both these he was Lord Welter's master. What with his luck and his superior play, it was very hard to lose decently sometimes ; and sometimes, as I said, he would cast his plans to the winds, and win terribly. But he always repented when he saw Lord Welter get savage, and lost dutifully, though at times he could barely keep his countenance. Nevertheless the balance he allowed to Lord Welter made a very important item in that gentleman's somewhat precarious income.

But, in spite of all his sacrifices, he but rarely got even a glimpse of Ellen. And, to complicate matters, Adelaide, who sat by and watched the play, and saw Hornby purposely losing at times, got it into her silly head that he was in love with her. She liked the man ; who did not ? But she had honour enough left to be rude to him. Hornby saw all this, and was amused. I often think that it must have been a fine spectacle, to see the honourable man playing with the scoundrel, and giving him just as much line as he chose. And, when I call Hornby an honourable man, I mean what I say, as you will see.

This was the state of things when the Derby crash came. At half-past five on that day the Viscountess Welter dashed up to her elegant residence in St. John's Wood, in a splendid barouche, drawn by four horses, and when "her people" came and opened the door and let down the steps, lazily descended, and, followed by her footman bearing her fal-lals, lounged up the steps as if life were really too ennuyant to be borne any longer. Three hours afterwards, a fierce eager woman, plainly dressed, with a dark veil, was taking apartments in the Bridge Hotel, London Bridge, for Mr. and Mrs. Staunton, who were going abroad in a few days ; and was overseeing, with her confidential servant, a staid man in black, the safe stowage of numerous hasped oak boxes, the most remarkable thing about which, was their great weight. The lady was Lady Welter,

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and the man was Lord Welter's confidential scoundrel. The landlord thought they had robbed Hunt and Roskell's, and were off with the plunder, till he overheard the man say, "I think that is all, my lady;" after which he was quite satisfied. The fact was that all the Ascot race plate, gold salvers and épergnes, silver cups rough with designs of the chase, and possibly also some of the Ascot family jewels, were so disgusted with the state of things in England, that they were thinking of going for a little trip on the Continent. What should a dutiful wife do but see to their safe stowage? If any enterprising burglar had taken it into his head to "crack" that particular "crib" known as the Bridge Hotel, and got clear off with the "swag," he might have retired on the hard-earned fruits of a well-spent life, into happier lands — might have been "run" for M.L.C., or possibly for Congress in a year or two. Who can tell?

And, also, if Lord Welter's confidential scoundrel had taken it into his head to waylay and rob his lordship's noble consort on her way home — which he was quite capable of doing — and if he also had got clear off, he would have found himself a better man by seven hundred and ninety-four pounds, three half-crowns, and a three-penny piece; that is, if he had done it before her ladyship had paid the cabman. But both the burglars and the valet missed the tide, and the latter regrets it to this day.

At eleven o'clock that night Lady Welter was lolling leisurely on her drawing-room sofa, quite bored to death. When Lord Welter, and Hornby, and Sir Robert Ferrers, and some Dragoons came in, she was yawning, as if life was really too much of a plague to be endured. Would she play loo? Oh, yes; anything after such a wretched, lonely evening. That was the game where you had three cards, wasn't it, and you needn't go on unless you liked? Would Welter or some one lend her some money? She had got a three-penny piece and a shilling somewhere or another, but that would not be enough, she supposed.

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Where was Sir Robert's little brother? Gone to bed? How tiresome; she had fallen in love with him, and had set her heart on seeing him to-night; and so on.

Lord Welter gave her a key, and told her there was some money in his dressing-case. As she left the room, Hornby, who was watching them, saw a quick look of intelligence pass between them, and laughed in his sleeve.

I have been given to understand that guinea unlimited loo is a charming pursuit, soothing to the feelings, and highly improving to the moral tone. I speak from hearsay, as circumstances over which I have no control have prevented my ever trying it. But this I know — that, if Lord Welter's valet had robbed his master and mistress when they went to bed that night; instead of netting seven hundred and ninety-four, seven, nine, he would have netted eleven hundred and forty-six, eight, six; leaving out the three-penny piece. But he didn't do it; and Lord and Lady Welter slept that sleep which is the peculiar reward of a quiet conscience, undisturbed.

But, next morning, when Charles waited on Hornby in his dressing-room, the latter said —

"I shall want you to-night, lad. I thought I might have last night; but, seeing the other fellows went, I left you at home. Be ready at half-past six. I lost a hundred and twenty pounds last night. I don't mean to afford it any longer. I shall stop it."

"Where are we to go to, sir?"

"To St. John's Wood. We shall be up late. Leave the servants' hall, and come up and lie in the hall as if you were asleep. Don't let yourself be seen. No one will notice you."

Charles little thought where he was going.

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Chapter II

The House full of Ghosts

CHARLES had really no idea where he was going. Although he knew that Hornby had been playing with Lord Welter, yet he thought, from what Hornby had said, that he would not bring him into collision with him ; and indeed he did not — only taking Charles with him as a reserve in case of accidents, for he thoroughly distrusted his lordship.

At half-past six in the evening Hornby rode slowly away, followed by Charles. He had told Charles that he should dine in St. John's Wood at seven, and should ride there, and Charles was to wait with the horses. But it was nearly seven, and yet Hornby loitered, and seemed undetermined. It was a wild, gusty evening, threatening rain. There were very few people abroad, and those who were rode or walked rapidly. And yet Hornby dawdled irresolute, as though his determination were hardly strong enough yet.

At first he rode quite away from his destination, but by degrees his horse's head got changed into the right direction ; then he made another detour, but a shorter one ; at last he put spurs to his horse, and rode resolutely up the short carriage-drive before the door, and, giving the reins to Charles, walked firmly in.

Charles put up the horses, and went into the servants' hall, or the room which answered that end in the rather small house of Lord Welter. No one was there. All the servants were busy with the dinner, and Charles was left unnoticed.

By and by a page, noticing a strange servant in passing the door, brought him some beer, and a volume of the Newgate Calendar. This young gentleman called his attention to a print of a lady cutting up the body of her hus-

The House full of Ghosts

band with a chopper, assisted by a young Jew, who was depicted "walking off with a leg," like one of the Fans (the use of which seems to be, to cool the warm imagination of other travellers into proper limits), while the woman was preparing for another effort. After having recommended Charles to read the letterpress thereof, as he would find it tolerably spicy, he departed, and left him alone.

The dinner was got over in time ; and after a time there was silence in the house — a silence so great that Charles rose and left the room. He soon found his way to another ; but all was dark and silent, though it was not more than half-past nine.

He stood in the dark passage, wondering where to go, and determined to turn back to the room from which he had come. There was a light there, at all events.

There was a light, and the Newgate Calendar. The wild wind, that had eddied and whirled the dust at the street corners, and swept across the park all day, had gone down, and the rain had come on. He could hear it, drip, drip, outside ; it was very melancholy. Confound the Newgate Calendar !

He was in a very queer house, he knew. What did Hornby mean by asking him the night before whether or no he could fight, and whether he would stick to him ? Drip, drip ; otherwise a dead silence. Charles's heart began to beat a little faster.

Where were all the servants ? He had heard plenty of them half an hour ago. He had heard a French cook swearing at English kitchen-girls, and had heard plenty of other voices ; and now — the silence of the grave. Or of Christie and Manson's on Saturday evening ; or of the Southern Indian Ocean in a calm at midnight ; or of anything else you like : similes are cheap.

He remembered now that Hornby had said, "Come and lie in the hall as if asleep ; no one will notice you." He determined to do so. But where was it ? His candle was

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flickering in its socket, and, as he tried to move it, it went out.

He could scarcely keep from muttering an oath, but he did. His situation was very uncomfortable. He did not know in what house he was — only that he was in a quarter of the town in which there were not a few uncommonly queer houses. He determined to grope his way to the light.

He felt his way out of the room and along a passage. The darkness was intense, and the silence perfect. Suddenly a dull red light gleamed in his eyes, and made him start. It was the light of the kitchen fire. A cricket would have been company, but there was none.

He continued to advance cautiously. Soon a ghostly square of very dim grey light on his left showed him where was a long narrow window. It was barred with iron bars. He was just thinking of this, and how very queer it was, when he uttered a loud oath, and came crashing down. He had fallen upstairs.

He had made noise enough to waken the seven sleepers ; but those gentlemen did not seem to be in the neighbourhood, or, at all events, if awakened, gave no sign of it. Dead silence. He sat on the bottom stair and rubbed his shins, and, in spite of a strong suspicion that he had got into a scrape, laughed to himself at the absurdity of his position.

“Would it be worth while, I wonder,” he said to himself, “to go back to the kitchen and get the poker? I’d better not, I suppose. It would be so deuced awkward to be caught in the dark with a poker in your hand. Being on the premises for the purpose of committing a felony — that is what they would say ; and then they would be sure to say that you were the companion of thieves, and had been convicted before. No. Under this staircase, in the nature of things, is the housemaid’s cupboard. What should I find there as a weapon of defence? A dust-pan. A great deal might be done with a dust-pan, mind you, at close quarters. How would it do to arrange

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all her paraphernalia on the stairs, and cry fire, so that mine enemies, rushing forth, might stumble and fall, and be taken unawares? But that would be acting on the offensive, and I have no safe grounds for pitching into anyone yet."

Though Charles tried to comfort himself by talking nonsense, he was very uncomfortable. Staying where he was, was intolerable; and he hardly dared ascend into the upper regions unbidden. Besides, he had fully persuaded himself that a disturbance was imminent, and, though a brave man, did not like to precipitate it. He had mistaken the character of the house he was in. At last, taking heart, he turned and felt his way upstairs. He came before a door through the keyhole of which the light streamed strongly; he was deliberating whether to open it or not, when a shadow crossed it, though he heard no noise, but a minute after the distant sound of a closing door. He could stand it no longer. He opened the door, and advanced into a blaze of light.

He entered a beautiful flagged hall, frescoed and gilded. There were vases of flowers round the walls, and strips of Indian matting on the pavement. It was lit by a single chandelier, which was reflected in four great pier-glasses reaching to the ground, in which Charles's top-boots and brown face were reduplicated most startlingly. The *tout ensemble* was very beautiful; but what struck Charles, was the bad taste of having an entrance-hall decorated like a drawing-room. "That is just the sort of thing they do in these places," he thought.

There were only two hats on the entrance table; one of which he was rejoiced to recognise as that of his most respected master. "May the deuce take his silly noddle for bringing me to such a place!" thought Charles.

This was evidently the front hall spoken of by Hornby; and he remembered his advice to pretend to go to sleep. So he lay down on three hall-chairs, and put his hat over his eyes.

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Hall-chairs are hard ; and, although Charles had just been laughing at the proprietor of the house for being so lavish in his decorations, he now wished that he had carried out his system a little further, and had cushions to his chairs. But no ; the chairs were *de rigueur*, with crests on the backs of them. Charles did not notice whose.

If a man pretends to go to sleep, and, like the Marchioness with her orange-peel and water, "makes believe very much," he may sometimes succeed in going to sleep in good earnest. Charles imitated the thing so well, that in five minutes he was as fast off as a top.

Till a night or two before this, Charles had never dreamt of Ravenshoe since he had left it. When the first sharp sting of his trouble was in his soul, his mind had refused to go back farther than to the events of a day or so before. He had dreamt long silly dreams of his master, or his fellow-servants, or his horses, but always, all through the night, with a dread on him of waking in the dark. But, as his mind began to settle and his pain got dulled, he began to dream about Ravenshoe, and Oxford, and Shrewsbury again ; and he no longer dreaded the waking as he did, for the reality of his life was no longer hideous to him. With the fatal "plasticity" of his nature, he had lowered himself, body and soul, to the level of it.

But to-night, as he slept on these chairs, he dreamt of Ravenshoe, and of Cuthbert, and of Ellen. And he woke, and she was standing within ten feet of him, under the chandelier.

He was awake in an instant, but he lay as still as a mouse, staring at her. She had not noticed him, but was standing in profound thought. Found, and so soon ! His sister ! How lovely she was, standing, dressed in light pearl gray, like some beautiful ghost, with her speaking eyes fixed on nothing. She moved now, but so lightly that her footfall was barely heard upon the matting. Then she turned and noticed him. She did not seem sur-

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prised at seeing a groom stretched out asleep on the chairs — she was used to that sort of thing probably — but she turned away, gliding through a door at the further end of the hall, and was gone.

Charles's heart was leaping and beating madly, but he heard another door open, and lay still.

Adelaide came out of a door opposite to the one into which Ellen had passed. Charles was not surprised. He was beyond surprise. But, when he saw her and Ellen in the same house, in one instant, with the quickness of lightning, he understood it all. It was Welter had tempted Ellen from Ravenshoe! Fool! fool! he might have prevented it once if he had only guessed.

If he had any doubt as to where he was now, it was soon dispelled. Lord Welter came rapidly out of the door after Adelaide, and called her in a whisper, "Adelaide."

"Well," she said, turning round sharply.

"Come back, do you hear?" said Lord Welter. "Where the deuce are you going?"

"To my own room."

"Come back, I tell you," said Lord Welter savagely, in a low voice. "You are going to spoil everything with your confounded airs."

"I shall not come back. I am not going to act as a decoy-duck to that man, or any other man. Let me go, Welter."

Lord Welter was very near having to let her go with a vengeance. Charles was ready for a spring, but watched, and waited his time. Lord Welter had only caught her firmly by the wrist to detain her. He was not hurting her.

"Look you here, my Lady Welter," he said slowly and distinctly. "Listen to what I've got to say, and don't try the shadow of a tantrum with me, for I won't have it for one moment. I don't mind your chaff and nonsense in public; it blinds people, it is racy and attracts people; but in private I am master, do you hear? Master. You know

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you are afraid of me, and have good cause to be, by Jove. You are shaking now. Go back to that room."

"I won't, I won't, I won't. Not without you, Welter. How can you use me so cruelly, Welter? Oh, Welter, how can you be such a villain?"

"You conceited fool," said Lord Welter contemptuously. "Do you think he wants to make love to you?"

"You know he does, Welter; you know it," said Adelaide passionately.

Lord Welter laughed good-naturedly. (He could be good-natured.) He drew her towards him and kissed her. "My poor little girl," he said, "if I thought that, I would break his neck. But it is utterly wide of the truth. Look here, Adelaide; you are as safe from insult as my wife, as you were at Ranford. What you are not safe from is my own temper. Let us be friends in private and not squabble so much, eh? You are a good shrewd, clever wife to me. Do keep your tongue quiet. Come in and mark what follows."

They had not noticed Charles, though he had been so sure that they would, that he had got his face down on the chair, covered with his arms, feigning sleep. When they went into the room again, Charles caught hold of a coat which was on the back of a chair, and, curling himself up, put it over him. He would listen, listen, listen for every word. He had a right to listen now.

In a minute a bell rang twice. Almost at the same moment some one came out of the door through which Lord Welter had passed, and stood silent. In about two minutes another door opened, and some one else came into the hall.

A woman's voice — Ellen's — said, "Oh, are you come again?"

A man's voice — Lieutenant Hornby's — said in answer, "You see I am. I got Lady Welter to ring her bell twice for you, and then to stay in that room, so that I might have an interview with you."

"I am obliged to her ladyship. She must have been

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surprised that I was the object of attraction. She fancied herself so."

"She was surprised. And she was more so, when I told her what my real object was."

"Indeed," said Ellen bitterly. "But her ladyship's surprise does not appear to have prevented her from assisting you."

"On the contrary," said Hornby, "she wished me God speed — her own words."

"Sir, you are a gentleman. Don't disgrace yourself and me — if I can be disgraced — by quoting that woman's blasphemy before me. Sir, you have had your answer. I shall go."

"Ellen, you must stay. I have got this interview with you to-night, to ask you to be my wife. I love you as I believe woman was never loved before, and I ask you to be my wife."

"You madman ! you madman !"

"I am no madman. I was a madman when I spoke to you before ; I pray your forgiveness for that. You must forget that. I say that I love you as a woman was never loved before. Shall I say something more, Ellen ?"

"Say on."

"You love me."

"I love you as man was never loved before ; and I swear to you that I hope I may lie stiff and cold in my unhonoured coffin, before I'll ruin the man I love, by tying him to such a wretch as myself."

"Ellen, Ellen, don't say that. Don't take such vows, which you will not dare to break afterwards. Think, you may regain all that you have lost, and marry a man who loves you — ah, so dearly ! — and whom you love too."

"Ay ; there's the rub. If I did not love you, I would marry you to-morrow. Regain all I have lost, say you ? Bring my mother to life again, for instance, or walk among other women again as an honest one ? You talk nonsense, Mr. Hornby — nonsense. I am going."

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"Ellen ! Ellen ! Why do you stay in this house ? Think once again."

"I shall never leave thinking ; but my determination is the same. I tell you, as a desperate woman like me dare tell you, that I love you far too well to ruin your prospects, and I love my own soul too well ever to make another false step. I stayed in this house because I loved to see you now and then, and hear your voice ; but now I shall leave it."

"See me once more, Ellen — only once more !"

"I will see you once more. I will tear my heart once more, if you wish it. You have deserved all I can do for you, God knows. Come here the day after to-morrow ; but come without hope, mind. A woman who has been through what I have can trust herself. Do you know that I am a Catholic ?"

"No."

"I am. Would you turn Catholic if I were to marry you ?"

God forgive poor Hornby ! He said, "Yes." What will not men say at such times ?

"Did I not say you were a madman ? Do you think I would ruin you in the next world, as well as in this ? Go away, sir ; and, when your children are round you, humbly bless God's mercy for saving you, body and soul, this night."

"I shall see you again ?"

"Come here the day after to-morrow ; but come without hope."

She passed through the door, and left him standing alone. Charles rose from his lair, and, coming up to him, laid his hand on his shoulder.

"You have heard all this," said poor Hornby.

"Every word," said Charles. "I had a right to listen, you know. She is my sister."

"Your sister ?"

Then Charles told him all. Hornby had heard enough from Lord Welter to understand it.

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"Your sister! Can you help me, Horton? Surely she will hear reason from you. Will you persuade her to listen to me?"

"No," said Charles. "She was right. You are mad. I will not help you do an act which you would bitterly repent all your life. You must forget her. She and I are disgraced, and must get away somewhere, and hide our shame together."

What Hornby would have answered, no man can tell; for at this moment Adelaide came out of the room, and passed quickly across the hall, saying good night to him as she passed. She did not recognise Charles, or seem surprised at seeing Hornby talking to his groom. Nobody who had lived in Lord Welter's house a day or two was surprised at anything.

But Charles, speaking to Hornby more as if he were master than servant, said, "Wait here;" and, stepping quickly from him, went into the room where Lord Welter sat alone, and shut the door. Hornby heard it locked behind him, and waited in the hall, listening intensely, for what was to follow.

"There'll be a row directly," said Hornby to himself; "and that chivalrous fool, Charles, has locked himself in. I wish Welter did not send all his servants out of the house at night. There'll be murder done here some day."

He listened and heard voices, low as yet — so low that he could hear the dripping of the rain outside. Drip — drip! The suspense was intolerable. When would they be at one another's throats?

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Chapter III

Charles's Explanation with Lord Welter

THERE is a particular kind of Ghost or Devil, which is represented by an isosceles triangle (more or less correctly drawn) for the body ; straight lines turned up at the ends for legs ; straight lines divided into five at the ends for arms ; a round O, with arbitrary dots for the features, for a head ; with a hat, an umbrella, and a pipe. Drawn like this, it is a sufficiently terrible object. But, if you take an ace of clubs, make the club represent the head, add horns, and fill in the body and limbs as above, in deep black, with the feather end of the pen, it becomes simply appalling, and will strike terror into the stoutest heart.

Is this the place, say you, for talking such nonsense as this ? If you must give us balderdash of this sort, could not you do so in a chapter with a less terrible heading than this one has ? And I answer, Why not let me tell my story my own way ? Something depends even on this nonsense of making devils out of the ace of clubs.

It was rather a favourite amusement of Charles's and Lord Welter's, in old times at Ranford. They used, on rainy afternoons, to collect all the old aces of clubs (and there were always plenty of them to be had in that house, God help it), and make devils out of them, each one worse than the first. And now, when Charles had locked the door, and advanced softly up to Welter, he saw, over his shoulder, that he had got an ace of clubs, and the pen and ink, and was making a devil.

It was a trifling circumstance enough, perhaps ; but there was enough of old times in it to alter the tone in which Charles said, " Welter," as he laid his hand on his shoulder.

Lord Welter was a bully ; but he was as brave as a

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lion, with nerves of steel. He neither left off his drawing, nor looked up ; he only said — " Charley boy, come and sit down till I have finished this fellow. Get an ace of clubs, and try your own hand. I am out of practice."

Perhaps even Lord Welter might have started when he heard Charles's voice, and felt his hand on his shoulder ; but he had had one instant—only one instant—of preparation. When he heard the key turn in the door, he had looked in a pier-glass opposite to him, and seen who and what was coming, and then gone on with his employment. Even allowing for this moment's preparation, we must give him credit for the nerve of one man in ten thousand ; for the apparition of Charles Ravenshoe was as unlooked for as that of any one of Charles Ravenshoe's remote ancestors.

You see, I call him Charles Ravenshoe still. It is a trick. You must excuse it.

Charles did not sit down and draw devils ; he said, in a quiet mournful tone,

" Welter, Welter, why have you been such a villain ? "

Lord Welter found that a difficult question to answer. He let it alone, and said nothing.

" I say nothing about Adelaide. You did not use me well there ; for, when you persuaded her to go off with you, you had not heard of my ruin."

" On my soul, Charles, there was not much persuasion wanted there."

" Very likely. I do not want to speak about that, but about Ellen, my sister. Was anything ever done more shamefully than that ? "

Charles expected some furious outbreak when he said that. None came. What was good in Lord Welter came to the surface, when he saw his old friend and playmate there before him, sunk so far below him in all that this world considers worth having, but rising so far above him in his fearless honour and manliness. He was humbled, sorry, and ashamed. Bitter as Charles's words were, he

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felt they were true, and had manhood enough left to not resent them. To the sensation of fear, as I have said before, Lord Welter was a total stranger, or he might have been nervous at being locked up in a room alone, with a desperate man, physically his equal, whom he had so shamefully wronged. He rose and leant against the chimney-piece, looking at Charles.

"I did not know she was your sister, Charles. You must do me that justice."

"Of course you did not. If —"

"I know what you are going to say — that I should not have dared. On my soul, Charles, I don't know; I believe I dare do anything. But I tell you one thing — of all the men who walk this earth, you are the last I would willingly wrong. When I went off with Adelaide, I knew she did not care sixpence for you. I knew she would have made you wretched. I knew better than you, because I never was in love with her, and you were, what a heartless ambitious jade it was! She sold herself to me for the title I gave her, as she had tried to sell herself to that solemn prig, Hainault, before. And I bought her, because a handsome, witty, clever wife is a valuable chattel to a man like me, who has to live by his wits."

"Ellen was as handsome and as clever as she. Why did not you marry her?" said Charles bitterly.

"If you will have the real truth, Ellen would have been Lady Welter now, but —"

Lord Welter hesitated. He was a great rascal, and he had a brazen front, but he found a difficulty in going on. It must be, I should fancy, very hard work to tell all the little ins and outs of a piece of villany one has been engaged in, and to tell, as Lord Welter did on this occasion, the exact truth.

"I am waiting," said Charles, "to hear you tell me why she was not made Lady Welter."

"What, you will have it then? Well, she was too scrupulous. She was too honourable a woman for this

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line of business. She wouldn't play, or learn to play — d—n it, sir, you have got the whole truth now, if that will content you."

"I believe what you say, my lord. Do you know that Lieutenant Hornby made her an offer of marriage to-night?"

"I supposed he would," said Lord Welter.

"And that she has refused him?"

"I guessed that she would. She is your own sister. Shall you try to persuade her?"

"I would see her in her coffin first."

"So I suppose."

"She must come away from here, Lord Welter. I must keep her and do what I can for her. We must pull through it together somehow."

"She had better go from here. She is too good for this hole. I must make provision for her to live with you."

"Not one halfpenny, my lord. She has lived too long in dependence and disgrace already. We will pull through together alone."

Lord Welter said nothing, but he determined that Charles should not have his way in this respect.

Charles continued, "When I came into this room to-night I came to quarrel with you. You have not allowed me to do so, and I thank you for it." Here he paused, and then went on in a lower voice, "I think you are sorry, Welter; are you not? I am sure you are sorry. I am sure you wouldn't have done it if you had foreseen the consequences, eh?"

Lord Welter's coarse under-lip shook for half a second, and his big chest heaved once; but he said nothing.

"Only think another time; that is all. Now do me a favour; make me a promise."

"I have made it."

"Don't tell any human soul you have seen me. If you do, you will only entail a new disguise and a new hiding on me. You have promised."

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"On my honour."

"If you keep your promise, I can stay where I am. How is — Lady Ascot?"

"Well. Nursing my father."

"Is he ill?"

"Had a fit the day before yesterday. I heard this morning from them. He is much better, and will get over it."

"Have you heard anything from Ravenshoe?"

"Not a word. Lord Saltire and General Mainwaring are both with my father, in London, Grandma won't see either me or Adelaide. Do you know that she has been moving heaven and earth to find you."

"Good soul! I won't be found, though. Now, good night!"

And he went. If any one had told him three months before that he would have been locked in the same room with a man who had done him such irreparable injury, and have left it at the end of half an hour with a quiet "good night," he would most likely have beaten that man there and then. But he was getting tamed very fast. Ay, he was already getting more than tamed; he was in a fair way to get broken-hearted.

"I will not see her to-night, sir," he said to Hornby, whom he found with his head resting on the table; "I will come to-morrow and prepare her for leaving this house. You are to see her the day after to-morrow; but without hope, remember."

He roused a groom from above the stable to help him to saddle the horses. "Will it soon be morning?" he asked.

"Morning," said the lad; "it's not twelve o'clock yet. It's a dark night, mate, and no moon. But the nights are short now. The dawn will be on us before we have time to turn in our beds."

He rode slowly home after Hornby. "The night is dark, but the dawn will be upon us before we can turn in

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our beds!" Only the idle words of a sleepy groom, yet they echoed in his ears all the way home. The night is dark indeed; but it will be darker yet before the dawn, Charles Ravenshoe.

Chapter IV

A Dinner Party among some Old Friends

LADY HAINAULT (*née* Burton, not the Dowager) had asked some one to dinner, and the question had been whom to ask to meet him. Mary had been called into consultation, as she generally was on most occasions, and she and Lady Hainault had made up a list together. Every one had accepted, and was coming; and here were Mary and Lady Hainault, dressed for dinner, alone in the drawing-room with the children.

"We could not have done better for him, Mary, I think. You must go in to dinner with him."

"Is Mary going to stop down to dinner?" said the youngest boy; "what a shame! I sha'n't say my prayers to-night if she don't come up."

The straightforward Gus let his brother know what would be the consequences of such neglect hereafter, in a plain-spoken way peculiarly his own.

"Gus! Gus! don't say such things," said Lady Hainault.

"The hymn-book says so, aunt," said Gus, triumphantly; and he quoted a charming little verse of Dr. Watts's, beginning, "There is a dreadful Hell."

Lady Hainault might have been puzzled what to say, and Mary would not have helped her, for they had had an argument about that same hymn-book (Mary contending that one or two of the hymns were as well left alone at first), when Flora struck in and saved her aunt, by remarking,

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"I shall save up my money and buy some jewels for Mary like aunt's, so that when she stays down to dinner some of the men may fall in love with her, and marry her."

"Pooh ! you silly goose," said Gus, "those jewels cost sixty million thousand pounds a-piece I don't want her to be married till I grow up, and then I shall marry her myself. Till then I shall buy her a yellow wig, like grandma Hainault's, and then nobody will want to marry her."

"Be quiet, Gus," said Lady Hainault.

It was one thing to say "be quiet, Gus," and it was another thing to make him hold his tongue. But, to do Gus justice, he was a good fellow, and never acted "*enfant terrible*" but to the most select and private audience. Now he had begun: "I wish some one would marry grandma," when the door was thrown open, the first guest was announced, and Gus was dumb.

"General Mainwaring." The general sat down between Lady Hainault and Mary, and, while talking to them, reached out his broad brown hand and lifted the youngest boy on his knee, who played with his ribands, and cried out that he would have the orange and blue one, if he pleased ; while Gus and Flora came and stood at his knee.

He talked to them both sadly in a low voice about the ruin which had come on Lord Ascot. There was worse than mere ruin, he feared. He feared there was disgrace. He had been with him that morning. He was a wreck. One side of his face was sadly pulled down, and he stammered in his speech. He would get over it. He was only three-and-forty. But he would not show again in society, he feared. Here was somebody else ; they would change the subject.

Lord Saltire. They were so glad to see him. Every one's face had a kind smile on it as the old man came and sat down among them. His own smile was not the least pleasant of the lot, I warrant you.

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"So you are talking about poor Ascot, eh?" he said. "I don't know whether you were or not; but if you were, let us talk about something else. You see, my dear Miss Corby, that my prophecy to you on the terrace at Ravenshoe is falsified. I said they would not fight, and lo, they are as good as at it."

They talked about the coming war, and Lord Hainault came in and joined them. Soon after another guest was announced.

Lady Ascot. She was dressed in dark grey silk, with her white hair simply parted under a plain lace cap. She looked so calm, so brave, so kind, so beautiful, as she came with firm strong step in at the door, that they one and all rose and came towards her. She had always been loved by them all; how much more deeply was she loved now, when her bitter troubles had made her doubly sacred.

Lord Saltire gave her his arm, and she came and sat down among them with her hands calmly folded before her.

"I was determined to come and see you to-night, my dear," she said. "I should break down if I couldn't see some that I loved. And to-night, in particular" (she looked earnestly at Lord Saltire). "Is he come yet?"

"Not yet, dear grandma," said Mary.

"No one is coming besides, I suppose?" asked Lady Ascot.

"No one; we are waiting for him."

The door was opened once more, and they all looked curiously round. This time the servant announced, perhaps in a somewhat louder tone than usual, as if he were aware that they were more interested,

"Mr. Ravenshoe."

A well-dressed, gentlemanly-looking man came into the room, bearing such a wonderful likeness to Charles Ravenshoe, that Lady Hainault and General Mainwaring, the only two who had never seen him before, started and thought they saw Charles himself. It was not Charles,

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though ; it was our old friend, William, whilom pad-groom to Charles Ravenshoe, Esquire, now himself William Ravenshoe, Esquire, of Ravenshoe.

He was the guest of the evening. He would be heir to Ravenshoe himself some day ; for they had made up their minds that Cuthbert would never marry. Ravenshoe, as Cuthbert was managing it now, would be worth ten or twelve thousand a year, and, if these new tin lodes came to anything, perhaps twenty. He had been a stable-helper, said old Lady Hainault — the companion of the drunken riots of his foster-brother impostor, and that quiet gentlemanly creature Welter. If he entered the house, she left it. To which young Lady Hainault had replied that some one must ask him to dinner in common decency, if it was only for the sake of that dear Charles, who had been loved by every one who knew him. That she intended to ask him to dinner, and that, if her dear mother-in-law objected to meet him, why the remedy lay with herself. Somebody must introduce him to some sort of society ; and Lord Hainault and herself had made up their minds to do it, so that further argument on the subject would be wasted breath. To which the Dowager replied that she really wished, after all, that Hainault had married that pretty chit of a thing, Adelaide Summers, as he was thinking of doing ; as she, the Dowager, could not have been treated with greater insolence even by her, bold as she was. With which Parthian piece of spite she had departed to Caster-ton with Miss Hicks, and had so goaded and snapped at that unfortunate reduced gentlewoman by the way, that at last Hicks, as her wont was, had turned upon her and given her as good as she brought. If the Dowager could have heard Lady Hainault telling her lord the whole business that night, and joking with him about his alleged *pen-chant* for Adelaide and heard the jolly laugh that those two good souls had about it, her ladyship would have been more spiteful still.

But, nevertheless, Lady Hainault was very nervous

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about William. When Mary was consulted, she promptly went bail for his good behaviour, and pled his cause so warmly that the tears stood in her eyes. Her old friend William ! What innocent plots she and he had hatched together against the priest in old times. What a bond there was between them in their mutual love for him who was lost to them.

But Lady Hainault would be on the safe side ; and so only the party named above were asked. All old friends of the family.

Before dinner was announced they were all at their ease about him. He was shy certainly, but not awkward. He evidently knew that he was asked there on trial, and he accepted his position. But he was so handsome (handsomer than poor Charles), he was so gentle and modest, and — perhaps, too, not least — had such a well modulated voice, that before the evening was over he had won every one in the room. If he knew anything of a subject he helped the conversation quietly, as well as he could ; if he had to confess ignorance (which was seldom, for he was among well-bred people) he did so frankly, but unobtrusively. He was a great success.

One thing puzzled him, and pleased him. He knew that he was a person of importance, and that he was the guest of the evening. But he soon found that there was another cause for his being interesting to them all, more powerful than his curious position, or his prospective wealth ; and that was his connexion with Charles Ravenshoe, now Horton. *He* was the hero of the evening. Half William's light was borrowed from him. He quickly became aware of it, and it made him happy.

How strange it is that some men have the power of winning such love from all they meet. I knew one, gone from us now by a glorious death, who had that faculty. Only a few knew his great worth and goodness ; and yet, as his biographer most truly says, those who once saw his face never forgot it. Charles Ravenshoe had that

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faculty also, though, alas, his value, both in worth and utility, was far inferior to that of the man to whom I have alluded above.* But he had the same infinite kindness towards everything created ; which is part of the secret.

The first hint that William had, as to how deeply important a person Charles was among the present company, was given him at dinner. Various subjects had been talked of indifferently, and William had listened, till Lord Hainault said to William,

"What a strange price people are giving for cobs ! I saw one sold to-day at Tattersall's for ninety guineas."

William answered, "Good cobs are very hard to get, Lord Hainault. I could get you ten good horses over fifteen, for one good cob."

Lord Saltire said, "My cob is the best I ever had ; and a sweet-tempered creature. Our dear boy broke it for me at Ravenshoe."

"Dear Charles," said Lady Ascot. "What a splendid rider he was ! Dear boy ! He got Ascot to write him a certificate about that sort of thing before he went away. Ah, dear !"

"I never thought," said Lord Saltire, quietly, "that I ever should have cared half as much for anybody as I do for that lad. Do you remember, Mainwaring," he continued, speaking still lower, while they all sat hushed, "the first night I ever saw him, when he marked for you and me at billiards, at Ranford ? I don't know why, but I loved the boy from the first moment I saw him. Both there and ever afterwards, he reminded me so strongly of Barkham. He had just the same gentle, winning way with him that Barkham had. Barkham was a little taller, though, I fancy," he went on, looking straight at Lady Ascot, and taking snuff. "Don't you think so, Maria ?"

No one spoke for a moment.

Lord Barkham had been Lord Saltire's only son. He had been killed in a duel at nineteen, as I have mentioned

* I mean C. M.

A Dinner Party among some Old Friends

before. Lord Saltire very rarely spoke of him, and, when he did, generally in a cynical manner. But General Mainwaring and Lady Ascot knew that the memory of that poor boy was as fresh in the true old heart after forty years, as it was on the morning when he came out from his dressing-room, and met them carrying his corpse up-stairs.

"He was a good fellow," said Lord Hainault, alluding to Charles. "He was a very good fellow."

"This great disappointment which I have had about him," said Lord Saltire, in his old dry tone, "is a just judgment on me for doing a good-natured and virtuous action many years ago. When his poor father Densil was in prison, I went to see him, and reconciled him with his family. Poor Densil was so grateful for this act of folly on my part, that I grew personally attached to him; and hence all this misery. Disinterested actions are great mistakes, Maria, depend upon it."

When the ladies were gone upstairs, William found Lord Saltire beside him. He talked to him a little time, and then finished by saying —

"You are modest and gentlemanly, and the love you bear for your foster-brother is very pleasing to me indeed. I am going to put it to the test. You must come and see me to-morrow morning. I have a great deal to say to you."

"About him, my lord? Have you heard of him?"

"Not a word. I fear he has gone to America or Australia. He told Lord Ascot he should do so."

"I'll hunt him to the world's end, my lord," said true William. "And Cuthbert shall pray for me the while. I fear you are right. But we shall find him soon."

When they went up into the drawing-room, Mary was sitting on a sofa by herself. She looked up to William, and he went and sat down by her. They were quite away from the rest, together.

"Dear William," said Mary, looking frankly at him, and laying her hand on his.

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"I am so glad," said William, "to see your sweet face again. I was down at Ravenshoe last week. How they love you there! An idea prevails among old and young that dear Cuthbert is to die, and that I am to marry you, and that we are to rule Ravenshoe triumphantly. It was useless to represent to them that Cuthbert would not die, and that you and I most certainly never would marry one another. My dearest Jane Evans was treated as a thing of nought. You were elected mistress of Ravenshoe unanimously."

"How is Jane?"

"Pining, poor dear, at her school. She don't like it."

"I should think not," said Mary. "Give my dear love to her. She will make you a good wife. How is Cuthbert?"

"Very well in health. No more signs of his heart complaint, which never existed. But he is peaking at getting no tidings from Charles. Ah, how he loved him! May I call you 'Mary'?"

"You must not dare to call me anything else. No tidings of him yet?"

"None. I feel sure he is gone to America. We will get him back, Mary. Never fear."

They talked till she was cheerful, and at last she said —

"William, you were always so well-mannered; but how — how — have you got to be so gentlemanly in so short a time?"

"By playing at it," said William, laughing. "The stud-groom at Ravenshoe used always to say I was too much of a gentleman for him. In twenty years' time I shall pass muster in a crowd. Good night."

And Charles was playing at being something other than a gentleman all the time. We shall see who did best in the end.

Charles's Second Expedition

Chapter V

Charles's Second Expedition to St. John's Wood

WHAT a happy place a man's bed is — probably the best place in which he ever finds himself. Very few people will like to deny that, I think ; that is to say, as a general rule. After a long day's shooting in cold weather, for instance ; or half a night on deck among the ice, when the fog has lifted, and the ghastly cold walls are safe in sight ; or after a fifty mile ride in the bush, under a pouring rain ; or after a pleasant ball, when you have to pull down the blind, that the impudent sun may not roast you awake in two hours ; for in all these cases, and a hundred more, bed is very pleasant ; but you know as well as I do, that there are times when you would sooner be on a frozen deck, or in the wildest bush in the worst weather, or waltzing in the hall of Eblis with Vathek's mama, or almost in your very grave, than in bed, and awake.

Oh, the weary watches ! when the soul, which in sleep would leave the tortured body to rest and ramble off in dreams, holds on by a mere thread, yet a thread strong enough to keep every nerve in tense agony. When one's waking dreams of the past as are vivid as those of sleep, and there is always present, through all, the dreadful lurking thought that one is awake, and that it is all real. When, looking back, every kindly impulsive action, every heartily spoken word, makes you fancy that you have only earned contempt where you merit kindness. Where the past looks like a hell of missed opportunities, and the future like another black hopeless hell of uncertainty and imminent misfortune of all kinds ! Oh, weary watches. Let us be at such times on the bleakest hill-side, in the coldest night that ever blew, rather than in the warmest bed that money will buy.

When you are going to have a night of this kind, you

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seldom know it beforehand, for certain. Sometimes, if you have had much experience in the sort of thing — if you have lost money, or gone in debt, or if your sweet-heart has cut you very often — you may at least guess, before you get your boots off, that you are going to have a night of it ; in which case, read yourself to sleep *in bed*. Never mind burning the house down (that would be rather desirable as a distraction from thought) ; but don't read till you are sleepy with your clothes on, and then undress, because, if you do, you will find, by the time you have undressed yourself, that you are terribly wide awake, and, when the candle is blown out, you will be all ready for a regular Walpurgis night.

Charles, poor lad, had not as yet had much experience of Walpurgis nights. Before his catastrophe he had never had one. He had been used to tumble tired into his bed, and sleep a heavy dreamless sleep till an hour before waking. Then, indeed, he might begin to dream of his horses, and his dogs, and so on, and then gradually wake into a state more sweet than the sweetest dream — that state in which sense is awake to all outward objects, but in which the soul is taking its few last airy flutters round its home, before coming to rest for the day. But, even since then, he had not had experience enough to make him dread the night. The night he came home from St. John's Wood, he thought he would go to bed and sleep it off. Poor fellow !

A fellow-servant slept in the same room with him — the younger and better-tempered of the two (though Charles had no complaint against either of them). The lad was asleep ; and, before Charles put out the light, he looked at him. His cheek was laid on his arm, and he seemed so calm and happy that Charles knew he was not there, but far away. He was right. As he looked, the lad smiled, and babbled of something in his dream. Strange ! the soul had still sufficient connexion with the body to make it smile.

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"I wonder if Miss Martineau or Mr. Atkinson ever watched the face of one who slept and dreamt," said Charles, rambling on as soon as he had got into bed. "Pish! why that fellow's body is the mere tool of his soul. His soul is out a-walking, and his body is only a log. Hey, that won't do; that's as bad as Miss Martineau. I should have said that his body is only a fine piece of clockwork. But clockwork don't smile of itself. My dear Madam, and Mr. Atkinson, I am going to leave my body behind, and be off at Ravenshoe in five minutes. That is to say, I am going to sleep."

He was, was he? Why no, not just at present. If he had meant to do so, he had, perhaps, better not have bothered himself about "Letters on the laws of man's nature;" for, when he had done his profound cogitations about them, as above, he thought that he had got a — well, say a pulex, in his bed. There was no more a pulex than there was a scorpion; but he had an exciting chase after an imaginary one, like our old friend Mr. Sponge after an imaginary fox at Laverick Wells. After this, he had an irritation where he couldn't reach, that is to say, in the middle of his back; then he had the same complaint where he could reach, and used a certain remedy (which is a pretty way of saying that he scratched himself); then he had the cramp in his right leg; then he had the cramp in his left leg; then he grew hot all over, and threw the clothes off; then he grew cold all over, and pulled them on again; then he had the cramp in his left leg again; then he had another flea hunt, cramp, irritation in back, heat, cold, and so on, all over; and then, after half an hour, finding himself in a state of feverish despondency, he fell into a cheerful train of thought, and was quite inclined to look at his already pleasant prospects from a hopeful point of view.

Poor dear fellow! You may say that it is heartless to make fun of him just now, when everything is going so terribly wrong. But really my story is so very sad, that

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we must try to make a little feeble fun where we can, or it would be unreadable.

He tried to face the future, manfully. But lo, there was no future to face — it was all such a dead, hopeless blank. Ellen must come away from that house, and he must support her ; but how ? It would be dishonourable for him to come upon the Ravenshoes for a farthing, and it would be dishonourable for her to marry that foolish Hornby. And these two courses, being dishonourable, were impossible. And there he was brought up short.

But would either course be dishonourable ? Yes, yes, was the answer each weary time he put the question to himself ; and there the matter ended. Was there one soul in the wide world he could consult ? Not one. All alone in the weary world, he and she. Not one friend for either of them. They had made their beds, and must lie on them. When would the end of it all come ? What would the end be ?

There was a noise in the street. A noise of a woman scolding, whose voice got louder and louder, till it rose into a scream. A noise of a man cursing and abusing her ; then a louder scream, and a sound of blows. One, two ; then a heavy fall, and silence. A drunken, homeless couple had fallen out in the street, and the man had knocked the woman down. That was all. It was very common. Probably the woman was not much hurt. That sort of woman got used to it. The police would come and take them to the station. There they were. The man and woman were being taken off by two constables, scolding and swearing. Well, well !

Was it to come to that ? There were bridges in London, and under them runs the river. Charles had come over one once, after midnight. He wished he had never seen the cursed place. He remembered a fluttering figure which had come and begged a halfpenny of him to pay the toll, and get home. He had given her money, and then, by a sudden impulse, followed her till she was safe

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off the bridge. Ugly thoughts, Charles! ugly thoughts! Will the dawn never come? Why, the night is not half over yet.

God in his mercy sets a limit to human misery in many ways. I do not believe that the condemned man, waiting through the weary night for the gallows, thinks all night through of his fate. We read generally in those accounts of the terrible last night (which are so rightly published in the newspapers — they are the most terrifying part of the punishment), that they conversed cheerfully, or slept, or did something, showing that they half forgot for a time what was coming. And so, before the little window grew to a lighter grey, poor Charles had found some relief from his misery. He was between sleep and waking, and he had fulfilled his challenge to Miss Martineau, though later than he intended. He had gone to Ravenshoe.

There it was, all before him. The dawn behind the eastern headland had flooded the amphitheatre of hills, till the crags behind the house had turned from grey to gold, and the vane upon the priest's tower shone like a star. The sea had changed from black to purple, and the fishing boats were stealing lazily homewards, over the gentle rolling groundswell. The surf was whispering to the sand of their coming. As window after window blazed out before the sun, and as woodland and hill-side, stream and park, village and lonely farm in the distant valley, waked before the coming day, Charles watched, in his mind's eye, the dark old porch, till there came out a figure in black, and stood solitary in the terrace gazing seawards. And as he said, "Cuthbert," he fell into a dreamless, happy sleep.

He determined that he would not go to see Ellen till the afternoon. Hornby was on duty in the morning, and never saw Charles all day; he avoided him as though on purpose. Charles, on his part, did not want to meet him till he had made some definite arrangement, and so was glad of it. But, towards two o'clock, it came across his

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mind that he would saunter round to St. Peter's Church, and see the comical little imp of a boy who was generally to be found there, and beguile a quarter of an hour by listening to his prattle.

He had given up reading. He had hardly opened a book since his misfortune. This may seem an odd thing to have to record about a gentleman, and to a certain extent a scholar; but so it was. He wanted to lower himself, and he was beginning to succeed. There was an essential honesty in him, which made him hate to appear what he was not; and this feeling, carried to an absurd extent, prevented his taking refuge in the most obvious remedy for all troubles except hunger: books. He did not know, as I do, that determined reading: reading of anything, even the advertisements in a newspaper; will stop all cravings except those of the stomach, and will even soften them; but he guessed it, nevertheless. "Why should I read it?" said he. "I must learn to do as the rest of them." And so he did as the rest of them, and "rather loafed away his time than otherwise."

And he was more inclined to "loaf" than usual this day, because he very much dreaded what was to come. And so he dawdled round to St. Peter's Church, and came upon his young friend, playing at fives with the ball he had given him, as energetically as he had before played with the brass button. Shoeblacks are compelled to a great deal of unavoidable "loafing;" but certainly this one loafed rather energetically, for he was hot and frantic in his play.

He was very glad to see Charles. He parted his matted hair from his face, and looking at him admiringly with a pleasant smile; then he suddenly said —

"You was drunk last night, worn't you?"

Charles said, No — that he never got drunk.

"Worn't you really, though?" said the boy; "you look as tho' you had a been. You looks wild about the eyes," and then he hazarded another theory to account for

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Charles's appearance, which Charles also negatived emphatically.

"I give a halpenny for this one," said the boy, showing him the ball, "and I spent the other halpenny." Here he paused, expecting a rebuke, apparently; but Charles nodded kindly at him, and he was encouraged to go on, and to communicate a piece of intelligence with the air of one who assumes that his hearer is *au fait* with all the movements of the great world, and will be interested.

"Old Biddy Flanigan's dead."

"No! is she?" said Charles, who, of course, had not the wildest idea who she was, but guessed her to be an aged, and probably dissipated Irishwoman.

"Ah! I believe you," said the boy. "And they was a-waking on her last night, down in our court (he said, 'dǎōne in āður cawt'). They waked we sharp enough; but, as for she! she's fast."

"What did she die of?" asked Charles.

"Well, she died mostly along of Mr. Malone's bumble foot, I fancy. Him and old Biddy was both drunk a-fighting on the stairs, and she was a step below he; and he being drunk, and bumble-footed too, lost his balance, and down they come together, and the back of her head come against the door scraper, and there she was. Wake she!" he added with scorn, "not if all the Irish and Rooshans in France was to put stones in their stockings, and howl a week on end, they wouldn't wake her."

"Did they put stones in their stockings?" asked Charles, thinking that it was some papist form of penance.

"Miss Ophelia Flanigan, she put half a brick in her stocking end, so she did, and come at Mr. Malone for to break his head with it, and there were a hole in the stocking, and the brick flew out, and hit old Denny Moriarty in the jaw, and broke it. And he worn't a doing nothink, he worn't; but was sitting in a corner decent and quiet, blind drunk, a singing to his self; and they took he to Guy's orspital. And the pleece come in, and got gallus

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well kicked about the head, and then they took they to Guy's orspital; and then Miss Flanigan fell out of winder into the airy, and then they took she to Guy's orspital; and there they is, the whole bilin of 'em in bed together, with their heads broke, a-eating of jelly and a-drinking of sherry wind; and then in comes a mob from Rosemary-lane, and then they all begins to get a bit noisy and want to fight, and so I hooked it."

"Then there are a good many Irish in your court?" said Charles.

"Irish! ah! I believe you. They're all Irish there except we and Billy Jones's lot. The Emperor of Rooshar is a nigger; but his lot is mostly Irish, but another bilin of Irish from Mr. Malone's lot. And one on 'em plays the bagpipes, with a bellus, against the water-butt of a Sunday evening, when they're off the lay. And Mr. Malone's lot heaves crockery and broken vegetables at him out of winder, by reason of their being costermongers, and having such things handy; so there's mostly a shine of a Sunday evening."

"But who are Mr. Malone, and Billy Jones, and the Emperor of Russia?"

"They keeps lodging houses," said the boy. "Miss Ophelia Flanigan is married on Mr. Malone, but she keeps her own name, because her family's a better one nor his'n, and she's ashamed of him. They gets on very well when they're sober, but since they've been a making money they mostly gets drunk in bed of a morning, so they ain't so happy together as they was."

"Does she often attack him with a brick in the foot of a stocking?" asked Charles.

"No," said the boy; "she said her papa had taught her that little game. She used to fist hold of the poker, but he got up to that, and spouted it. So now they pokes the fire with a mopstick, which ain't so handy to hit with, and softer."

Charles walked away northward, and thought what a

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charming sort of person Miss Ophelia Flanigan must be, and how he would rather like to know her for curiosity's sake. The picture he drew of her in his mind was not exactly like the original, as we shall see.

It was very pleasant summer weather — weather in which an idle man would be inclined to dawdle, under any circumstances; and Charles was the more inclined to dawdle, because he very much disliked the errand on which he went. He could loiter at street corners now with the best of them, and talk to any one who happened to be loitering there too. He was getting on.

So he loitered at street corners, and talked. And he found out something to-day for the first time. He had been so absorbed in his own troubles that all rumours had been to him like the buzzing of bees; but to-day he began to appreciate that this rumour of war was no longer a mere rumour, but likely to grow into an awful reality.

If he were only free, he said to himself. If he could only provide for poor Ellen. "Gad, if they could get up a regiment of fellows in the same state of mind as I am!"

He went into a public-house, and drank a glass of ale. They were talking of it there. "Sir Charles Napier is to have the fleet," said one man, "and if he don't bring Cronstadt about their ears in two hours, I am a Dutchman. As for Odessa —"

A man in seedy black, who (let us hope) had seen better days, suggested Sebastopol. The first man had not heard of Sebastopol. It could not be a place of much importance, or he must have heard of it. Talk to him about Petersburg and Moscow, and he would listen to you.

This sort of talk, heard everywhere on his slow walk, excited Charles; and thinking over it, he came to the door of Lord Welter's house and rang.

The door was barely opened, when he saw Lord Welter himself in the hall, who called to him by his Christian name, and bade him come in. Charles followed Lord Welter

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into a room, and, when the latter turned round, Charles saw that he was disturbed and anxious.

"Charles," he said, "Ellen is gone!"

Charles said "Where?" for he hardly understood him.

"Where? God knows! She must have left the house soon after you saw her last night. She left this note for me. Take it and read it. You see I am free from blame in this matter."

Charles took it and read it.

"MY LORD,

"I should have consented to accept the shelter of your roof for a longer period, were it not that, by doing so, I should be continually tempted to the commission of a dishonourable action — an action which would bring speedy punishment on myself, by ruining too surely the man whom, of all others in the world, I love and respect.

"Lieutenant Hornby has proposed marriage to me. Your lordship's fine sense of honour will show you at once how impossible it is for me to consent to ruin his prospects by a union with such a one as myself. Distrusting my own resolution, I have fled, and henceforth I am dead to him and to you.

"Ah! Welter, Welter! you yourself might have been loved as he is, once; but that time is gone by for ever. I should have made you a better wife than Adelaide. I might have loved you myself once, but I fell more through anger and vanity than through love.

"My brother, he whom we call Charles Ravenshoe, is in this weary world somewhere. I have an idea that you will meet him. You used to love one another. Don't let him quarrel with you for such a worthless straw as I am. Tell him I always loved him as a brother. It is better that we should not meet yet. Tell him that he must make his own place in the world before we meet, and then I have something to say to him.

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"Mary, the Mother of God, and the blessed saints before the throne, bless you and him, here and hereafter !"

Charles had nothing to say to Lord Welter, not one word. He saw that the letter was genuine. He understood that Welter had had no time to tell her of his coming, and that she was gone ; neither Welter nor he knew where, or were likely to know ; that was all. He only bid him good-bye, and walked home again.

When you know the whole story, you will think that Charles's run of ill luck at this time is almost incredible ; but I should call you to witness that it is not so. This was the first stroke of real ill luck that he had had. All his other misfortunes came from his mad determination of alienating himself from all his friends. If he had even left Lord Welter free to have mentioned that he had been seen, all might have gone well, but he made him promise secrecy ; and now, after having, so to speak, made ill luck for himself, and lamented over it, here was a real stroke of it with a vengeance, and he did not know it. He was not anxious about Ellen's future ; he felt sure at once that she was going into some Roman Catholic refuge, where she would be quiet and happy. In fact, with a new fancy he had in his head, he was almost content to have missed her. And Ellen, meanwhile, never dreamt either of his position or state of mind, or she would have searched him out at the end of the world. She thought he was just as he always had been, or, perhaps, turning his attention to some useful career, with Cuthbert's assistance ; and she thought she would wait, and wait she did ; and they went apart, not to meet till the valley of the shadow of death had been passed, and life was not so well worth having as it had been.

But as for our old friend, Father Mackworth. As I said once before, " It's no use wondering, but I do wonder," whether Father Mackworth, had he known how

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near Ellen and Charles had been to meeting the night before, would not have whistled "Lillibulero," as Uncle Toby did in times of dismay ; that is, if he had known the tune.

Chapter VI

Ravenshoe Hall, during All This

THE villagers at Ravenshoe, who loved Charles, were very much puzzled and put out by his sudden disappearance. Although they had little or no idea of the real cause of his absence, yet it was understood to be a truth, not to be gainsayed, that it was permanent. And as it was a heavily-felt misfortune to them, and as they really had no idea why he was gone, or where he was gone to, it became necessary that they should comfort themselves by a formula. At which time, Master Lee, up to Slarrow, erected the theory, that Master Charles was gone to the Indies — which was found to be a doctrine so comfortable to the souls of those that adopted it, as being hazy and vague, and as leaving his return an open question, that it was unanimously adopted ; and those who ventured to doubt it, were treated as heretics and heathens.

It was an additional puzzle to them to find that William had turned out to be a gentleman, and a Ravenshoe ; a fact which could not, of course, be concealed from them, though the other facts of the case were carefully hushed up — not a very difficult matter in a simple feudal village, like Ravenshoe. But, when William appeared, after a short absence, he suffered greatly in popularity, from the belief that he had allowed Charles to go to the Indies by himself. Old Master James Lee, of Tor Head, old Master James Lee, of Withycombe Barton, and old Master James Lee, up to Slarrow, the three great quidnuncs of the village, were sunning themselves one day under the wall which divides part of the village from the shore, when by

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there came, talking earnestly together, William, and John Marston.

The three old men raised their hats, courteously. They were in no distinguishable relation to one another, but, from similarity of name and age, always hunted in a leash. (Sporting men will notice a confusion here about the word "leash," but let it pass.) When no one was by, I have heard them fall out and squabble together about dates, or such like ; but, when others were present, they would, so to speak, trump one another's tricks to any amount. And if, on these occasions, any one of the three took up an untenable position, the other two would lie him out of it like Jesuits, and only fall foul of him when they were alone together — which, to say the least of it, was neighbourly and decent.

"God save you, gentlemen," said old Master Lee up to Slarrow, who was allowed to commit himself by the other two, who were waiting to be "down on him" in private. "Any news from the Indies lately ?"

William and Marston stopped, and William said —

"No, Master Lee, we have not heard from Captain Archer for seven months, or more."

"I ask your pardon," said Lee up to Slarrow ; "I warn't a speaking of he. I was speaking of our own darling boy, Master Charles. When be he a-coming back to see we ?"

"When, indeed !" said William. "I wish I knew, Master Lee."

"They Indies," said the old man, "is well enough ; but what's he there no more than any other gentleman ? Why don't he come home to his own ? Who's a-keeping on him away ?"

William and John Marston walked on without answering. And then the two other Master Lees fell on to Master Lee up to Slarrow, and verbally ill treated him — partly because he had got no information out of William, and partly because, having both sat quiet and given him plenty of rope, he had not hanged himself. Master Lee up to

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Sparrow had evil times of it that blessed spring afternoon, and ended by "dratting" both his companions, for a couple of old fools. After which, they adjourned to the public-house and hard cider, sent them to drink for their sins.

"They'll never make a scholar of me, Marston," said William; "I will go on at it for a year, but no more. I shall away soon to hunt up Charles. Is there any police in America?"

Marston answered absently, "Yes; he believed so;" but was evidently thinking of something else.

They had gone sauntering out for a walk together. Marston had come down from Oxford the day before (after an examination for an Exeter fellowship, I believe) for change of air; and he thought he would like to walk with William up to the top of the lofty promontory, which bounded Ravenshoe-bay on the west, and catch the pleasant summer breeze coming in from the Atlantic.

On the loftiest point of all, with the whispering blue sea on three sides of them, four hundred feet below, there they sat down on the short sheep-eaten turf, and looked westward.

Cape after cape stretched away under the afternoon sun, till the last seemed only a dark cloud floating on the sea. Beyond that cape there was nothing but water for three thousand weary miles. The scene was beautiful enough, but very melancholy; a long coast-line, trending away into dim distance, on a quiet sunny afternoon, is very melancholy. Indeed, far more melancholy than the same place in a howling gale: when the nearest promontory only, is dimly visible, a black wall, echoing the thunder of bursting waves, and when sea, air, and sky, like the three furies, are rushing on with mad, destructive unanimity.

They lay, these two, on the short turf, looking westward; and, after a time, John Marston broke silence. He spoke very low and quietly, and without looking at William.

"I have something very heavy on my mind, William. I am not a fool, with a morbid conscience, but I have

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been very wrong. I have done what I never can undo. I loved that fellow, William ! ”

William said “ Ay.”

“ I know what you would say. You would say, that every one who ever knew Charles loved him ; and you are right. He was so utterly unselfish, so entirely given up to trying to win others, that every one loved him, and could not help it. The cleverest man in England, with all his cleverness, could not gain so many friends as Charles.”

William seemed to think this such a self-evident proposition, that he did not think it worth while to say anything.

“ And Charles was not clever. And what makes me mad with myself is this. I had influence over him, and I abused it. I was not gentle enough with him. I used to make fun of him, and be flippant, and priggish, and dictatorial, with him. God help me ! And now he has taken some desperate step, and, in fear of my ridicule, has not told me of it. I felt sure he would come to me, but I have lost hope now. May God forgive me — God forgive me ! ”

In a few moments, William said, “ If you pause to think, Marston, you will see how unjust you are to yourself. He could not be afraid of me, and yet he has never come near me.”

“ Of course not,” said Marston. “ You seem hardly to know him so well as I. He fears that you would make him take money, and that he would be a burthen on you. I never expected that he would come back to you. He knows that you would never leave him. He knows, as well as you know yourself, that you would sacrifice all your time and your opportunities of education to him. And, by being dependent on you, he would be dependent on Father Mackworth — the only man in the world he dislikes and distrusts.”

William uttered a form of speech concerning the good

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father, which is considered by foreigners to be merely a harmless national *façon de parler*—sometimes, perhaps, intensive, when the participle is used, but in general no more than expletive. In this case, the speaker was, I fear, in earnest, and meant what he said most heartily.

Marston never swore, but he certainly did not correct William for swearing, in this case, as he should have done. There was a silence for a time. After a little, William laid his hand on Marston's shoulder, and said—

"He never had a truer friend than you. Don't you blame yourself."

"I do ; and shall, until I find him."

"Marston," said William, "what *has* he done with himself ? Where the deuce is he gone ? "

"Lord Saltire and I were over the same problem for two hours the other night, and we could make nothing of it, but that he was gone to America or Australia. He hardly took money enough with him to keep him till now. I can make nothing of it. Do *you* think he would be likely to seek out Welter ? "

"If he were going to do so, he would have done so by now, and we must have heard of it. No," said William.

"He was capable of doing very odd things," said Marston. "Do you remember that Easter vacation, when he and Lord Welter and Mowbray went away together ? "

"Remember ! " said William. "Why I was with them ; and glorious fun it was. Rather fast fun though — too fast by half. We went up and lived on the Severn and Avon Canal, among the bargemen, dressing accordingly. Charles had nothing to do with that folly, beyond joining in it, and spending the day in laughing. That was Lord Welter's doing. The bargees nicknamed Lord Welter 'the sweep,' and said he was a good fellow, but a terrible blackguard. And so he was—for that time, at all events."

Marston laughed, and, after a time, said, "Did he ever

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seem to care about soldiering? Do you think he was likely to enlist?"

"It is possible," said William; "it is quite possible. Yes, he has often talked to me about soldiering. I mind — I remember, I should say — that he once was hot about going into the army, but he gave it up because it would have taken him away from Mr. Ravenshoe too much."

They turned and walked homewards, without speaking a word all the way. On the bridge they paused and leant upon the coping, looking into the stream. All of a sudden, William laid his hand on Marston's arm, and looking in his face, said —

"Every day we lose, I feel he is getting farther from us. I don't know what may happen. I shall go and seek him. I will get educated at my leisure. Only think of what may be happening now! I was a fool to have given it up so soon, and to have tried waiting till he came to us. He will never come. I must go and fetch him. Here is Cuthbert, too, good fellow, fretting himself to death about it. Let us go and talk to him."

And John Marston said, "Right, true heart; let us go."

Of all their acquaintances, there was only one who could have given them any information — Lord Welter; and he, of all others, was the very last they dreamt of going to. You begin to see, I dare say, that, when Charles is found, my story will nearly be at an end. But my story is not near finished yet, I assure you.

Standing where they were on the bridge, they could look along the village street. It was as neat a street as one ever sees in a fishing village; that is to say, rather an untidy one, for, of all human employments, fishing involves more lumber and mess than any other. Everything past use was "hit," as they say in Berkshire, out into the street; and of the inorganic part of this refuse, that is to say, tiles, bricks, potsherds, and so on, the children built themselves shops and bazaars, and sold one another the organic orts, that is to say, cabbage-stalks, fish-bones, and orange-

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peel, which were paid for in mussel-shells. And, as Mars-ton and William looked along this street, as one may say, at high market time, they saw Cuthbert come, slowly riding along among the children, and the dogs, and the pigs, and the herring-bones, and brickbats.

He was riding a noble horse, and was dressed with his usual faultless neatness and good taste, as clean as a new pin from top to toe. As he came along, picking his way gently among the children, the fishermen and their wives came out right and left from their doors, and greeted him kindly. In older times they would not have done this, but it had got about that he was pining for the loss of his brother, and their hearts had warmed to him. It did not take much to make their hearts warm to a Ravenshoe; though they were sturdy, independent rogues enough at times. I am a very great admirer of the old feudal feeling, when it is not abused by either party. In parts of Australia, where it, or something near akin to it, is very strong indeed, I have seen it act on high and low most beneficially; giving to the one side a sense of responsibility, and to the other a feeling of trust and reliance. "Here's 'Captain Dash,' or 'Colonel Blank,' or 'Mr. So-and-so,' and he won't see me wronged, I know. I have served him and his father for forty year, and he's a *gentleman*, and so were his father before him." That is the sort of thing you will hear often enough in Australia. And even on the diggings, with all the leaven of Americanism and European Radicalism one finds there, it is much easier for a warden to get on with the diggers if he comes of a known colonial family, than if he is an unknown man. The old colonial diggers, the people of the greatest real weight, talk of them, and the others listen and mark. All people, prate as they may, like a guarantee for respectability. In the colonies, such a guarantee is given by a man's being tolerably well off, and "come of decent people." In England, it is given, in cases, by a man and a man's forefathers having been good landlords and honest men.

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Such a guarantee is given by such people as the Ravenshoes, but that is not the whole secret of *their* influence. That comes more from association — a feeling strong enough, as one sees, to make educated and clever men use their talents and eloquence towards keeping a school in a crowded, unhealthy neighbourhood, instead of moving it into the country ; merely because, as far as one can gather from their speeches, they were educated at it themselves, twenty years ago. Hereby visiting the sins of the fathers on the children, with a vengeance !

“Somewhat too much of this.” It would be stretching a point to say that Cuthbert was a handsome man, though he was very near being so, indeed. He was tall, but not too slender, for he had developed in chest somewhat since we first knew him. His face was rather pale, but his complexion perfectly clear ; save that he had a black mark round his eyes. His features were decidedly marked, but not so strongly as Charles’s ; and there was an air of stately repose about him, showing itself in his way of carrying his head perfectly upright, and the firm, but not harsh, settling of his mouth, with the lower lip slightly pouting, which was very attractive. He was a consummate horseman, too, and, as I said, perfectly dressed ; and, as he came towards them, looking apparently at nothing, both William and Marston thought they had never seen a finer specimen of a gentleman.

He had strangely altered in two months. As great a change had come over him as comes over a rustic when the drill-sergeant gets him and makes a soldier of him. There is the same body, the same features, the same hair and eyes. Bill Jones is Bill Jones, if you are to believe his mother. But Bill Jones the soldier is not Bill Jones the ploughboy. He is quite a different person. So, since the night when Charles departed, Cuthbert had not been the Cuthbert of former times. He was no longer wayward and irritable ; he was as silent as ever, but he had grown so staid, so studiously courteous to every one, so

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exceedingly humble-minded and patient with every one, that all save one or two wondered at the change in him.

He had been passionately fond of Charles, though he had seldom shown it, and was terribly cut up at his loss. He had greatly humiliated himself to himself by what was certainly his felonious offer to Father Mackworth ; and he had found the estate somewhat involved, and had determined to set to work and bring it to rights. These three causes had made Cuthbert Ravenshoe a humbler and better man than he had ever been before.

"William," he said, smiling kindly on him, "I have been seeing after your estate for you. It does me good to have some one to work for. You will die a rich man."

William said nothing. One of Cuthbert's fixed notions was that he would die young and childless. He claimed to have a heart-complaint, though it really appeared without any foundation. It was a fancy which William had combated at first, but now acquiesced in, because he found it useless to do otherwise.

He dismounted and walked with them. "Cuthbert," said William, "we have been thinking about Charles."

"I am always thinking about him," said Cuthbert ; "is there no way of finding him ?"

"I am going. I want you to give me some money and let me go."

"You had better go at once, William. You had better try if the police can help you. We are pretty sure that he is gone to America, unless he has enlisted. In either case, it is very possible we may find him. Aunt Ascot would have succeeded, if she had not lost her temper. Don't you think I am right, my dear Marston ?"

"I do, indeed, Ravenshoe," said Marston. "Don't you think now, Mr. Mackworth, that, if a real push is made, and with judgment, we may find Charles again ?"

They had reached the terrace, and Father Mackworth was standing in front of the porch. He said he believed it was perfectly possible. "Nay," he said, "possible ! I

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am as sure of seeing Charles Horton back here again, as I am that I shall eat my dinner to-day."

"And I," said Cuthbert, "am equally sure that we shall see poor Ellen back some day. Poor girl! she shall have a warm welcome."

Father Mackworth said he hoped it might be so. And the lie did not choke him.

"We are going to send William away again to look after him, father," said Cuthbert.

"He had much better stay at home and mind his education," said Mackworth.

William had his back towards them, and was looking out to sea, whistling. When the priest spoke he turned round sharply, and said —

"Hey? what's that?"

The priest repeated it.

"I suppose," said William, "that that is more my business than yours, is it not? I don't intend to go to school again, certainly not to you."

Cuthbert looked from one to the other of them, and said nothing. A few days before this William and the priest had fallen out; and Mackworth, appealing, had been told with the greatest kindness and politeness by Cuthbert that he could not interfere. That William was heir to Ravenshoe, and that he really had no power over him whatever. Mackworth had said nothing then, but now he had followed Cuthbert into the library, and, when they were alone, said —

"Cuthbert, I did not expect this from you. You have let him insult me twice, and have not corrected him."

Cuthbert put his back against the door and said —

"Now you don't leave this room till you apologize for these wicked words. My dear old fellow, what a goose you are! Have not you and he always squabbled? Do fight it out with him, and don't try and force me to take a side. I ain't going to do it, you know, and so I tell you plainly. Give it to him. Who can do it so well as you?"

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Remember what an altered position he is in. How can you expect me to take your part against him ? ”

Father Mackworth cleared his brow, and said, laughing, “ You are right, Cuthbert. I’ll go about with the rogue. He is inclined to kick over the traces, but I’ll whip him in a little. I have had the whip hand of every Ravenshoe I have had to deal with yet, yourself included, and it’s hard if I am to be beat by this new whipper-snapper.”

Cuthbert said affectionately to him, “ I think you love me, Mackworth. Don’t quarrel with him more than you can help. I know you love me.” And so Cuthbert went to seek John Marston.

Love him ! Ay, that he did. John Mackworth could be cruel, hard, false, vindictive. He could cheat, and he could lie, if need were. He was heartless and ambitious. But he loved Cuthbert. It was a love which had taken a long time growing, but there it was, and he was half ashamed of it. Even to himself he would try to make out that it was mere selfishness and ambition — that he was gentle with Cuthbert, because he must keep his place at Ravenshoe. Even now he would try to persuade himself that such was the case — perhaps the more strongly, because he began to see now that there was a soft spot in his heart, and that Cuthbert was master of it. Since the night when Cuthbert had offered him ten thousand pounds, and he had refused it, Cuthbert had never been the same to him. And Mackworth, expecting to find this influence increased, found to his astonishment that from that moment it was *gone*. Cuthbert’s intensely sensitive and proud nature revolted from the domination of a man before whom he had so lowered himself ; and firmly, though humbly now, for he was altered by seeing how nearly he had been a villain, he let him see that he would walk in future in his own strength. Father Mackworth saw soon that Ravenshoe was a comfortable home for him, but that his power was gone. Unless !

And yet he knew that he could exercise a power little

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dreamt of. It is in the power, possibly, of a condemned man to burn the prison down, and possibly his interest ; but he has compunctions. Mackworth tried to persuade himself that the reason he did not use his power was that it would not be advisable. He was a cipher in the house, and knew by instinct that he would never be more. But in reality, I believe, he let his power sleep for Cuthbert's sake.

"Who could have thought," he said, "that the very thing which clinched my power, as I thought, should have destroyed it ? Are not those people fools, who lay down rules for human action ? Why, no. They are possibly right five times out of ten. But as for the other five ! Bah !"

"No, I won't allow that. It was my own fault. I should have known his character better. But there, I could not have helped it, for he did it himself. I was passive."

And Cuthbert followed Marston into the hall, and said, "You are not going away because William goes, Marston ?"

"Do you want me ?" said Marston.

"Yes," said Cuthbert. "You must stay with me. My time is short, and I must know as much of this world as I may. I have much to do ; you must help me. I will be like a little child in your hands. I will die in the old faith, but I will learn something new."

And so Marston stayed with him, and they two grew fast friends. Cuthbert had nothing to learn in his management of his estate ; there he was Marston's master ; but all that a shrewd young man of the world could teach a bookworm, so much Cuthbert got from Marston.

Marston one day met the village doctor, the very man whom we saw at the beginning of the book, putting out William (whom we then supposed to be Charles) to nurse. Marston asked him, "Was there any reality in this heart-complaint of Cuthbert's ?"

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"Not the very faintest shadow of a reality," said the doctor. "It is the most tiresome whimsy I ever knew. He has persuaded himself of it, though. He used to be very hypochondriac. He is as likely to live till eighty as you are."

Chapter VII

A Meeting

THERE was ruin in the Ascot family, we know. And Lord Ascot, crippled with paralysis at six-and-forty, was lying in South Audley Street, nursed by Lady Ascot. The boxes, which we saw packed ready for their foreign tour at the London Bridge Hotel, were still there — not gone abroad yet, for the simple reason that Herodias had won the Oaks, and that Lord Welter had won, some said seven, others said seventy thousand pounds. (He had really won nine.) So the boxes might stay where they were a few days, and he might pursue his usual avocations in peace, all his debts of honour being satisfied.

He had barely saved himself from being posted. Fortunately for him, he had, on the Derby, betted chiefly with a few friends, one of whom was Hornby; and they waited and said nothing till after the Oaks, when they were paid, and Welter could hold up his head again. He was indebted to the generosity of Hornby and Sir Charles Ferrers for his honour — the very men whom he would have swindled. But he laughed and ate his dinner, and said they were good fellows, and thought no more of it.

The bailiffs were at Ranford. The servants were gone, and the horses were advertised at Tattersall's already. It was reported in the county that an aged Jew, being in possession, and prowling about the premises, had come into the poultry yard, and had surreptitiously slain, cooked, and essayed to eat, the famous cock "Sampson," the champion bird of England, since his match with "Young

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Countryman." On being informed by the old keeper that my lord had refused sixty guineas for him a few weeks before, he had (so said the county) fled out of the house, tearing his hair, and knocked old Lady Hainault, who had also come prowling over in her pony-carriage, down the steps, flat on her back. Miss Hicks, who was behind with her shawls, had picked her up, they said, and "caught it."

If Adelaide was beautiful everywhere, surely she was more beautiful on horseback than anywhere else, and no one knew it better than herself. She was one of the first who appeared in the park in a low-crowned hat — a "wide-awake." They are not *de rigueur* even yet, I believe; but Adelaide was never very particular so long as she could look well. She had found out how splendid her perfect mask looked under the careless, irregular curves of such a head-dress, and how bright her banded hair shone in contrast with a black ostrich feather which drooped on her shoulder. And so she had taken to wear one since she had been Lady Welter, and had appeared in the park in it twice.

Lord Welter bethought himself once in these times — that is, just after the Oaks — that he would like to take his handsome wife out and show her in the park. His Hornby speculation had turned out ill; in fact, Hornby had altogether made rather a handsome sum out of him, and he must look for some one else. The some one else, a young Austrian, Pscechenyi by name, a young fellow of wealth, had received his advances somewhat coldly, and it became necessary to hang out Adelaide as a lure.

Lord Welter was aware that, if he had asked Adelaide to come and ride with him, on the ground of giving her an afternoon's amusement, and tried to persuade her to it by fair-spoken common-places, she would probably not have come; and so he did nothing of the kind. He and his wife thoroughly understood one another. There was perfect confidence between them in everything. Towards

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one another they were perfectly sincere, and this very sincerity begot a feeling of trust between them, which ultimately ripened into something better. They began life together without any professions of affection ; but out of use, and a similarity of character, there grew a liking in the end. She knew everything about Lord Welter, save one thing, which she was to know immediately, and which was of no importance ; and she was always ready to help him, provided, as she told him, "he didn't humbug," which his lordship, as we know, was not inclined to do, without her caution.

Lord Welter went into her dressing-room in the morning, and said —

"Here's a note from Pscechenyi. He won't come to-night."

"Indeed !" said Adelaide, brushing her hair. "I did not give him credit for so much sense. Really, you know, he can't be such a fool as he looks."

"We must have him," said Lord Welter.

"Of course we must," said Adelaide. "I really cannot allow such a fat goose to run about with a knife and fork in him any longer. Heigh ho ! Let's see. He affects Lady Brittlejug, don't he ? I am going to her party to-night, and I'll capture him for you, and bring him home to you from under her very nose. Now do try and make a better hand of him than you did of Hornby, or we shall all be in the workhouse together."

"I'll do my best," said Lord Welter, laughing. "But look here. I don't think you'll catch him so, you know. She looks as well as you by candlelight, but she can't ride a hang. Come out in the park this afternoon. He will be there."

"Very well," said Adelaide ; "I suppose you know best, I shall be glad of a ride. Half-past two, then."

So at the time appointed these two innocent lambkins rode forth to take the air. Lord Welter, big, burly, red-faced, good humoured, perfectly dressed, and sitting on his

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horse as few others could sit, the model of a frank English nobleman. Adelaide, beautiful and fragile beyond description, perfect in dress and carriage, riding trustingly and lovingly in the shadow of her lord, the happy, timid bride all over. They had no groom. What should a poor simple couple like them want with a groom? It was a beautiful sight, and many turned to look at them.

But Lord Saltire, who was looking out of the drawing-room window of Lord Ascot's house in South Audley Street, as they passed, turned to Marston, and said very emphatically —

"Now, I do really wonder what infernal mischief those two are after. There is an air of pastoral simplicity about their whole get-up, which forebodes some very great — very great" — here he paused, took snuff, and looked Marston straight in the face — "obliquity of moral purpose."

Meanwhile, the unconscious innocents sauntered on into the park, under the Marble Arch, and down towards Rotten-row. When they got into the Row they had a canter. There was Pscechenyi riding with Hornby and Miss Buckjumper, but they gave them the "go by," and went softly on towards Kensington-gate. "Who is the woman in the hat and feathers?" said everybody who didn't know. "Lady Welter," said everybody who did; and, whatever else they said of her, they all agreed that she was wonderfully beautiful, and rode divinely. When they came slowly back they found Hornby and the Austrian were standing against the rail talking to some ladies. They drew close up, and entered into conversation. And Adelaide found herself beside Miss Buckjumper, now Lady Handlycross.

Adelaide was somewhat pleased to find herself at the side of this famous horsewoman and beauty. She was so sure that comparisons would be favourable to herself. And they were. If ever an exquisitely formed nose was, so to speak, put out of joint, that nose was in the middle

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of Miss Buckjumper's face that day. Nevertheless, she did not show anything. She had rather a respect for Adelaide, as being a successful woman. Was not she herself cantering for a coronet? There was very soon a group round them, and Lord Welter's hoarse jolly laugh was heard continually. People, who were walking in the park to see the great people, paused outside the circle to look at her, and repassed again. Mr. Pelagius J. Bottom, of New York, whose father emigrated to Athens, and made a great fortune at the weaving business in the time of King Theseus, got on a bench, and looked at her through a double-barrelled opera-glass. There never was such a success. The Austrian thought no more of Hornby's cautions, thought no more of Miss Buckjumper or Lady Brittlejug. He was desperately in love, and was dying for some excuse to withdraw his refusal of this morning. Pelagius Jas. Bottom would have come, and mortgaged the paternal weaving business at the dice, but unfortunately his letters of introduction, being all addressed to respectable people, did not include one to Lord and Lady Welter. All the young fellows would have come and played all night, till church-time next morning, for her sake. As Lord Welter candidly told her that night, she was the best investment he had ever made.

They did not want all the young fellows though. Too many cooks spoil the broth. They only wanted the young Austrian, and so Lord Welter said, after a time, "I was in hopes of seeing you at my house to-night." That was quite enough. Fifty Hornbys would not have stopped him now.

Still they stood there talking. Adelaide was almost happy. Which of these staid women had such power as she? There was a look of pride and admiration even on Lord Welter's stupid face. Yes, it was a great success. Suddenly all people began to look one way and come towards the rails, and a buzz arose, "The Queen — the Queen!"

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Adelaide turned just as the outriders were opposite to her. She saw the dark claret-coloured carriage, fifty yards off, and she knew that Lady Emily Montford, who had been her sister-bridesmaid at Lady Hainault's wedding, was in waiting that day. Hornby declares the whole thing was done on purpose. Let us be more charitable, and suppose that her horse was startled at the scarlet coats of the outriders; however it was, the brute took fright, stood on its hind legs, and bolted straight towards the royal carriage. She reined it up within ten feet of the carriage step, plunging furiously. Raising her whip hand to push her hat more firmly on, she knocked it off, and sat there bareheaded, with one loop of her hair fallen down, a sight which no man who saw it ever forgot. She saw a look of amazed admiration in the Queen's face. She saw Lady Emily's look of gentle pity. She saw her Majesty lean forward, and ask who it was. She saw her name pass Lady Emily's lips, and then she saw the Queen turn with a frown, and looking steadily the other way.

Wrath and rage were in her heart, and showed themselves one instant in her face. A groom had run out and picked up her hat. She bent down to take it from him, and saw that it was Charles Ravenshoe.

Her face grew soft again directly. Poor thing! she must have had a kind heart after all, crusted over as it was with vanity, pride, and selfishness. Now, in her anger and shame, she could have cried to see her old love so degraded. There was no time for crying, or for saying more than a few sharp words, for they were coming towards her.

"What nonsense is this, Charles?" she said. "What is this masquerade? Are you come to double my shame? Go home and take that dress off and burn it. Is your pride dead, that you disgrace yourself like this in public? If you are desperate, as you seem, why are you not at the war? They want desperate men there. Oh! if I was a man!"

Ravenshoe

They parted then ; no one but Lord Welter and Hornby knew who Charles was. The former saw that Adelaide had recognised him, and, as they rode simply home together, said —

“ I knew poor Charles was a groom. He saw his sister the other night at our house. I didn't tell you ; I hardly know why. I really believe, do you know, that the truth of the matter is, Adelaide, that I did not want to vex you. Now ! ”

He looked at her as if he thought she would disbelieve him, but she said —

“ Nay, I do believe you, Welter. You are not an ill-natured man, but you are selfish and unprincipled. So am I, perhaps to a greater extent than you. At what time is that fool of a German coming ? ”

“ At half-past eleven.”

“ I must go to that woman Brittlejug's party. I must show there, to keep friends with her. She has such a terrible tongue. I will be back by twelve or so.”

“ I wish you could stay at home.”

“ I really dare not, my dear Welter. I must go. I will be back in good time.”

“ Of course you will please yourself about it,” said Lord Welter, a thought sulkily. And, when he was by himself, he said —

“ She is going to see Charles Ravenshoe. Well, perhaps she ought. She treated him d — d bad ! And so did I.”

Chapter VIII

Another Meeting

LORD ASCOT had been moved into South Audley Street, his town house, and Lady Ascot was there nursing him. General Mainwaring was off for Varna. But Lord Saltire had been a constant visitor, bringing with him very

Another Meeting

often Marston, who was, you will remember, an old friend of Lady Ascot.

It was not at all an unpleasant house to be in. Lord Ascot was crippled—he had been seized with paralysis at Epsom; and he was ruined. But every one knew the worst, and felt relieved by thinking that things could get no worse than worst, and so must get better.

In fact, every one admitted to the family party about that time remembered it as a very happy and quiet time indeed. Lord Ascot was their first object, of course; and a more gentle and biddable invalid than the poor fellow made can hardly be conceived. He was passionately fond of reading novels (a most reprehensible practice), and so was easily amused. Lord Saltire and he would play picquet; and every evening there would be three hours of whist, until the doctor looked in the last thing, and Lord Ascot was helped to bed.

Marston was always set to play with Lord Ascot, because Lord Saltire and Lady Ascot would not play against one another. Lord Saltire was, of course, one of the best players in Europe; and I really believe that Lady Ascot was not the worst by any means. I can see the party now. I can see Lady Ascot laying down a card, and looking at the same time at her partner, to call his attention to her lead. And I can see Lord Saltire take out his snuff-box thereat, as if he were puzzled, but not alarmed. William would come sometimes and sit quietly behind Marston, or Lord Saltire, watching the game. In short, they were a very quiet pleasant party indeed.

One night — it was the very night on which Adelaide had lost her hat in the Park — there was no whist. Marston had gone down to Oxford suddenly, and William came in to tell them so. Lady Ascot was rather glad, she said, for she had a friend coming to tea, who did not play whist; so Lord Saltire and Lord Ascot sat down to picquet, and William talked to his aunt.

“Who is your friend, Maria?” asked Lord Saltire.

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"A Mr. Bidder, a minister. He has written a book on the Revelations, which you really ought to read, James ; it would suit you."

They both laughed.

"About the seven seals, hey?" said Lord Saltire ; "*'septem phocæ,'* as I remember Machynleth translated it at Eton once. We called him '*Vitulina*' ever after. The name stuck to him through life with some of us. A capital name for him, too ! His fussy blundering in this war-business is just like his old headlong way of looking out words in his dictionary. He is an ass, Maria ; and I will bet fifty pounds that your friend, the minister, is another."

"How can you know ? at all events, the man he brings with him is none."

"Another minister ?"

"Yes, a Moravian missionary from Australia."

"Then certainly another ass, or he would have gone as missionary to a less abominably detestable hole. They were all burnt into the sea there the other day. Immediately after which the rivers rose seventy feet, and drowned the rest of them."

Soon after were announced Mr. Bidder and Mr. Smith. Mr. Bidder was an entirely unremarkable man ; but Mr. Smith was one of the most remarkable men I have ever seen, or rather heard — for externally there was nothing remarkable about him, except a fine forehead, and a large expressive grey eye, which, when he spoke to you, seemed to come back from a long distance, and fix itself upon yours. In manners he was perfect. He was rather taciturn, though always delighted to communicate information about his travels, in a perfectly natural way. If one man wanted information on botany, or what not, he was there to give it. If another wanted to hear about missionary work, he was ready for him. He never spoke or acted untruthfully for one instant. He never acted the free and easy man of the world, as some religious gentlemen of all

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sects feel it necessary to do sometimes, imitating the real thing as well as Paul Bedford would imitate Fanny Ellsler. What made him remarkable was his terrible earnestness, and the feeling you had, that his curious language was natural, and meant something ; something very important indeed.

He has something to do with the story. The straws in the gutter have to do with the history of a man like Charles, a man who leaves all things to chance. And this man Smith is very worthy of notice, and so I have said thus much about him, and am going to say more.

Mr. Bidder was very strong on the Russian war, which he illustrated by the Revelations. He was a good fellow, and well-bred enough to see that his friend Smith was an object of greater interest to Lady Ascot than himself ; so he " retired into " a book of prints, and left the field clear.

Mr. Smith sat by Lady Ascot, and William drew close up. Lady Ascot began by a common-place, of course.

" You have suffered great hardships among those savages, Mr. Smith, have you not ? "

" Hardships ! Oh, dear no, my dear lady. Our station was one of the pleasantest places in the whole earth, I believe ; and we had a peaceful time. When the old man is strong in me I wish I was back there."

" You did not make much progress with them, I believe ? "

" None whatever. We found out after a year or two that it was hopeless to make them understand the existence of a God ; and after that we stayed on to see if we could bring them to some knowledge of agriculture, and save them from their inevitable extermination, as the New Zealanders have been saved."

" And to no purpose ? "

" None. For instance, we taught them to plant our potatoes for us. They did it beautifully, but in the night they dug them up and ate them. And in due season we waited that our potatoes should grow, and they grew not.

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Then they came to Brother Hillyar, my coadjutor, an old man, now ruling ten cities for his master, and promised for rewards of flour to tell him why the potatoes did not grow. And he, loving them, gave them what they desired. And they told him that they dug them up while we slept. And for two days I went about my business laughing in secret places, for which he tried to rebuke me, but could not, laughing himself. The Lord kept him waiting long, for he was seventy-four; but, doubtless, his reward is the greater."

William said, "You brought home a collection of zoological specimens, I think. They are in the Museum."

"Yes. But what I could not bring over were my live pets. I and my wife had a menagerie of our own — a great number of beasts —"

Mr. Bidder looking up from his book, catching the last sentence only, said that the number of the beast was 666; and, then turning round, held himself ready to strike into the conversation, thinking that the time was come when he should hide his light no longer.

"The natives are very low savages, are they not, Mr. Smith?" said William. "I have heard that they cannot count above ten."

"Not so far as that," said Mr. Smith. "The tribe we were most among used to express all large unknown quantities by 'eighty-four';* it was as x and y to them. That seems curious at first, does it not?"

William said it did seem curious, their choosing that particular number. But Mr. Bidder, dying to mount his hobby-horse, and not caring how, said it was not at all curious. If you multiplied the twelve tribes of Israel into the seven cities of refuge, there you were at once.

* A fact with regard to one tribe, to the author's frequent confusion. Any number above two, whether of horses, cattle, or sheep, was always represented as being eighty-four. Invariably, too, with an adjective introduced after the word "four," which we don't use in a drawing-room.

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Mr. Smith said he thought he had made a little mistake. The number, he fancied, was ninety-four.

Lord Saltire, from the card-table, said that that made the matter clearer than before. For if you placed the Ten Commandments to the previous result you arrived at ninety-four, which was the number wanted. And his lordship, who had lost, and was consequently possibly cross, added that, if you divided the whole by the five foolish virgins, and pitched Tobit's dog neck and heels, into the result, you would find yourself much about where you started.

Mr. Bidder, who, as I said, was a good fellow, laughed, and Mr. Smith resumed the conversation once more ; Lord Saltire seemed interested in what he said, and did not interfere with him.

"You buried poor Mrs. Smith out there," said Lady Ascot. "I remember her well. She was very beautiful as a girl."

"Very beautiful," said the missionary. "Yes ; she never lost her beauty, do you know. That climate is very deadly to those who go there with the seeds of consumption in them. She had done a hard day's work before she went to sleep, though she was young. Don't you think so, Lady Ascot ?"

"A hard day's work ; a good day's work, indeed. Who knows better than I ?" said Lady Ascot. "What an awaking it must be from such a sleep as hers !"

"Beyond the power of human tongue to tell," said the missionary, looking dreamily as at something far away. "Show me the poet that can describe in his finest language the joy of one's soul when one wakes on a summer's morning. Who, then, can conceive or tell the unutterable happiness of the purified soul, waking face to face with the King of Glory ?"

Lord Saltire looked at him curiously, and said to himself, "This fellow is in earnest. I have seen this sort of thing before. But seldom ! Yes, but seldom !"

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"I should not have alluded to my wife's death," continued the missionary in a low voice, "but that her ladyship introduced the subject. And no one has a better right to hear of her than her kind old friend. She fell asleep on the Sabbath evening after prayers. We moved her bed into the verandah, Lady Ascot, that she might see the sunlight fade out on the tops of the highest trees — a sight she always loved. And from the verandah we could see through the tree stems Mount Joorma, laid out in endless folds of woodland, all purple and gold. And I thought she was looking at the mountain, but she was looking far beyond that, for she said, 'I shall have to wait thirty years for you, James, but I shall be very happy and very busy. The time will go quick enough for me, but it will be a slow weary time for you, my darling. Go home from here, my love, into the great towns, and see what is to be done there.' And so she went to sleep.

"I rebelled for three days. I went away into the bush, with Satan at my elbow all the time, through dry places, through the forest, down by lonely creeksides, up among bald volcanic downs, where there are slopes of slippery turf, leading down to treacherous precipices of slag; and then through the quartz ranges, and the reedy swamps, where the black swans float, and the spurwinged plover hovers and cackles; all about I went among the beasts and the birds. But on the third day the Lord wearied of me, and took me back, and I lay on His bosom again like a child. He will always take you home, my lord, if you come. After three days, after thrice twenty years, my lord. Time is nothing to Him."

Lord Saltire was looking on him with kindly admiration.

"There is something in it, my lord. Depend upon it that it is not all a dream. Would not you give all your amazing wealth, all your honours, everything, to change places with me?"

"I certainly would," said Lord Saltire. "I have always

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been of opinion that there was something in it. I remember," he continued, turning to William, "expressing the same opinion to your father in the Fleet Prison once, when he had quarrelled with the priests for expressing some opinions which he had got from me. But you must take up with that sort of thing very early in life if you mean it to have any reality at all. I am too old now." *

Lord Saltire said this in a different tone from his usual one. In a tone that we have never heard him use before. There was something about the man Smith which, in spite of his quaint language, softened every one who heard him speak. Lady Ascot says it was the grace of God. I entirely agree with her ladyship.

"I came home," concluded the missionary, "to try some city work. My wife's nephew, John Marston, whom I expected to see here to-night, is going to assist me in this work. There seems plenty to do. We are at work in Southwark at present."

Possibly it was well that the company, more particularly Lady Ascot, were in a softened and forgiving mood. For, before any one had resumed the conversation, Lord Ascot's valet stood in the door, and, looking at Lady Ascot with a face which said as plain as words, "It is a terrible business, my lady, but I am innocent," announced —

"Lady Welter."

Lord Saltire put his snuff-box into his right-hand trousers' pocket, and his pocket handkerchief into his left, and kept his hands there, leaning back in his chair, with his legs stretched out, and a smile of infinite wicked amusement on his face. Lord Ascot and William stared

* Once for all, let me call every honest reader to witness, that, unless I speak in the first person, I am not bound to the opinions of any one of the characters in this book. I have merely made people speak as I think they would have spoken. Even in a story, consisting so entirely of incident as this, I feel it necessary to say so much, for no kind of unfairness is so common as that of identifying the opinions of a story-teller with those of his *dramatis personæ*.

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like a couple of gabies. Lady Ascot had no time to make the slightest change, either in feature or position, before Adelaide, dressed for the evening in a cloud of white and pink, with her bare arms loaded with bracelets, a swans-down fan hanging from her left wrist, sailed swiftly into the room, with outstretched hands, bore down on Lady Ascot, and began kissing her, as though the old lady were a fruit of some sort, and she were a dove pecking at it.

"Dearest grandma!" — peck. "So glad to see you!" — peck. "Couldn't help calling in on you as I went to Lady Brittlejug's — and how well you are looking!" — peck, peck. "I can spare ten minutes — do tell me all the news, since I saw you. My dear Lord Ascot, I was so sorry to hear of your illness, but you look better than I expected. And how do *you* do, my dear Lord Saltire?"

Lord Saltire was pretty well, and was delighted to see Lady Welter apparently in the enjoyment of such health and spirits, and so on, aloud. But, secretly, Lord Saltire was wondering what on earth could have brought her here. Perhaps she only wanted to take Lady Ascot by surprise, and force her into a recognition of her as Lady Welter. No. My lord saw there was something more than that. She was restless and absent with Lady Ascot. Her eye kept wandering, in the middle of all her rattling talk; but, wherever it wandered, it always came back to William, of whom she had hitherto taken no notice whatever.

"She has come after him. For what?" thought my lord. "I wonder if the jade knows anything of Charles."

Lady Ascot had steeled herself against this meeting. She had determined, firstly, that no mortal power should ever induce her to set eyes on Adelaide again; and, secondly, that she, Lady Ascot, would give her, Adelaide, a piece of her mind, which she should never forget to her dying day. The first of these, rather contradictory, determinations had been disposed of by Adelaide's audacity; and, as for the second; why, the piece of Lady As-

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cot's mind which was to be given to Adelaide was, somehow, not ready ; but, instead of it, only silent tears, and withered, trembling fingers, which wandered lovingly over the beautiful young hand, and made the gaudy bracelets on the wrist click one against the other.

"What could I say, Brooks ? what could I do ?" said Lady Ascot to her maid that night, "when I saw her own self come back, with her own old way ? I love the girl more than ever, Brooks, I believe. She beat me. She took me by surprise. I could not resist her. If she had proposed to put me in a wheelbarrow, and wheel me into the middle of that disgraceful, that detestable woman, Brittlejug's drawing-room, there and then, I should have let her do it, I believe. I might have begged for time to put on my bonnet ; but I should have gone."

She sat there ten minutes or more, talking. Then she said that it was time to go, but that she should come and see Lady Ascot on the morrow. Then she turned to William, to whom she had not been introduced, and asked, would he see her to her carriage ? Lord Saltire was next the bell, and, looking her steadily in the face, raised his hand slowly to pull it. Adelaide begged him eagerly not to trouble himself ; he, with a smile, promptly dropped his hand, and out she sailed on William's arm, Lord Saltire holding the door open, and shutting it after her, with somewhat singular rapidity.

"I hope none of those fools of servants will come blundering upstairs before she has said her say," he remarked aloud. "Give us some of your South African experiences, Mr. Smith. Did you ever see a woman beautiful enough to go clip a lion's claws single-handed, eh ?"

William, convoying Adelaide downstairs, had got no further than the first step, when he felt her hand drawn from his arm ; he had got one foot on the step below, when he turned to see the cause of this. Adelaide was standing on the step above him, with her glorious face bent sternly, almost fiercely, down on his, and the hand

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from which the fan hung pointed towards him. It was as beautiful a sight as he had ever seen, and he calmly wondered what it meant. The perfect mouth was curved in scorn, and from it came sharp ringing words, decisive, hard, clear, like the sound of a hammer on an anvil.

"Are you a party to this shameful business, sir? you, who have taken his name, and his place, and his prospects in society. You, who professed, as I hear, to love him like another life, dearer than your own. You, who lay on the same breast with him — tell me, in God's name, that you are sinning in ignorance."

William, as I have remarked before, had a certain amount of shrewdness. He determined to let her go on. He only said, "You are speaking of Charles Ravenshoe."

"Ay," she said sharply; "of Charles Ravenshoe, sir — ex-stable-boy. I came here to-night to beard them all; to ask them, did they know, and did they dare to suffer it. If they had not given me an answer, I would have said such things to them as would have made them stop their ears. Lord Saltire has a biting tongue, has he? Let him hear what mine is. But, when I saw you among them, I determined to save a scene, and speak to you alone. Shameful —"

William looked quietly at her. "Will your ladyship remark that I, that all of us, have been moving heaven and earth to find Charles Ravenshoe, and that we have been utterly unable to find him? If you have any information about him, would it not be as well to consider that the desperation caused by your treatment of him was the principal cause of his extraordinary resolution of hiding himself? And, instead of scolding me and others, who are doing all we can, to give us all the information in your power?"

"Well, well," she said, "perhaps you are right. Consider me rebuked, will you have the goodness? I saw Charles Ravenshoe to-day."

"To-day!"

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"Ay, and talked to him."

"How did he look? was he pale? was he thin? Did he seem to want money? Did he ask after me? Did he send any message? Can you take me to where he is? Did he seem much broken down? Does he know we have been seeking him? Lady Welter, for God's sake, do something to repair the wrong you did him, and take me to where he is."

"I don't know where he is, I tell you. I saw him for just one moment. He picked up my hat in the Park. He was dressed like a groom. He came from I know not where, like a ghost from the grave. He did not speak to me. He gave me my hat, and was gone. I do not know whose groom he is, but I think Welter knows. He will tell me to-night. I dared not ask him to-day, lest he should think I was going to see him. When I tell him where I have been, and describe what has passed here, he will tell me. Come to me to-morrow morning, and he shall tell you; that will be better. You have sense enough to see why."

"I see."

"Another thing. He has seen his sister Ellen. And yet another thing. When I ran away with Lord Welter, I had no idea of what had happened to him — of this miserable *esclandre*. But you must have known that before, if you were inclined to do me justice. Come to-morrow morning. I must go now."

And so she went to her carriage by herself after all. And William stood still on the stairs, triumphant. Charles was as good as found.

The two clergymen passed him on their way downstairs, and bade him good night. Then he returned to the drawing-room, and said —

"My lord, Lady Welter has seen Charles to-day, and spoken to him. With God's help, I will have him here with us to-morrow night."

It was half-past eleven. What Charles, in his headlong

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folly and stupidity, had contrived to do before this time, must be told in another chapter — no, I have not patience to wait. My patience is exhausted. One act of folly following another so fast would exhaust the patience of Job. If one did not love him so well, one would not be so angry with him. I will tell it here and have done with it. When he had left Adelaide, he had gone home with Hornby. He had taken the horses to the stable; he had written a note to Hornby. Then he had packed up a bundle of clothes, and walked quietly off.

Round by St. Peter's church — he had no particular reason for going there, except, perhaps, that his poor foolish heart yearned that evening to see some one who cared for him, though it were only a shoe-black. There was still one pair of eyes which would throw a light for one instant into the thick darkness which was gathering fast around him.

His little friend was there. Charles and he talked for a while, and at last he said —

"You will not see me again. I am going to the war. I am going to Windsor to enlist in the Hussars to-night."

"They will kill you," said the boy.

"Most likely," said Charles. "So we must say good-bye. Mind, now, you go to the school at night, and say that prayer I gave you on the paper. We must say good-bye. We had better be quick about it."

The boy looked at him steadily. Then he began to draw his breath in long sighs — longer, longer yet, till his chest seemed bursting. Then out it all came in a furious hurricane of tears, and he leant his head against the wall, and beat the bricks with his clenched hand.

"And I am never to see you no more! no more! no more!"

"No more," said Charles. But he thought he might soften the poor boy's grief; and he did think, too, at the moment, that he would go and see the house where his kind old aunt lived, before he went away for ever; so he said —

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"I shall be in South Audley Street, 167, to-morrow at noon. Now, you must not cry, my dear. You must say good-bye."

And so he left him, thinking to see him no more. Once more, Charles, only once more, and then God help you!

He went off that night to Windsor, and enlisted in the 140th Hussars.

Chapter IX

Half a Million

AND so you see here we are all at sixes and sevens once more. Apparently as near the end of the story, as when I wrote the adventures of Alured Ravenshoe at the court of Henry the Eighth in the very first chapter. If Charles had had a little of that worthy's impudence, instead of being the shy, sensitive fellow he was, why, the story would have been over long ago. In point of fact, I don't know that it would ever have been written at all. So it is best as it is for all parties.

Although Charles had enlisted in Hornby's own regiment, he had craftily calculated that there was not the slightest chance of Hornby's finding it out for some time. Hornby's troop was at the Regent's Park. The headquarters were at Windsor, and the only officer likely to recognise him was Hornby's captain. And so he went to work at his new duties with an easy mind, rather amused than otherwise, and wondering where and when it would all end.

From sheer unadulterated ignorance I cannot follow him during the first week or so of his career. I have a suspicion, almost amounting to certainty, that, if I could, I should not. I do not believe that the readers of Ravenshoe would care to hear about sword-exercise, riding-school, stableguard, and so on. I can, however, tell you thus

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much, that Charles learnt his duties in a wonderfully short space of time, and was a great favourite with high and low.

When William went to see Adelaide by appointment the morning after his interview with her, he had an interview with Lord Welter, who told him, in answer to his inquiries, that Charles was groom to Lieutenant Hornby.

"I promised that I would say nothing about it," he continued; "but I think I ought: and Lady Welter has been persuading me to do so, if any inquiries were made, only this morning. I am deuced glad, Ravenshoe, that none of you have forgotten him. It would be a great shame if you had. He is a good fellow, and has been infernally used by some of us — by me, for instance."

William, in his gladness, said, "Never mind, my lord; let bygones be bygones. We shall all be to one another as we were before, please God. I have found Charles, at all events; so there is no gap in the old circle, except my father's. I had a message for Lady Welter."

"She is not down; she is really not well this morning, or she could have seen you."

"It is only this. Lady Ascot begs that she will come over to lunch. My aunt wished she would have stopped longer last night."

"Your aunt?"

"My aunt, Lady Ascot."

"Ah! I beg pardon; I am not quite used to the new state of affairs. Was Lady Welter with Lady Ascot last night?"

William was obliged to say yes, but felt as if he had committed an indiscretion by having said anything about it.

"The deuce she was!" said Lord Welter. "I thought she was somewhere else. Tell my father that I will come and see him to-day, if he don't think it would be too much for him."

"Ah, Lord Welter! you would have come before, if you had known —"

"I know, I know. You must know that I had my rea-

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sons for not coming. Well, I hope that you and I will be better acquainted in our new positions ; we were intimate enough in our old."

When William was gone, Lord Welter went up to his wife's dressing-room, and said —

"Lady Welter, you are a jewel. If you go on like this, you will be recognised, and we shall die at Ranford — you and I — a rich and respectable couple. If 'ifs and ands were pots and pans,' Lady Welter, we should do surprisingly well. If, for instance, Lord Saltire could be got to like me something better than a mad dog, he would leave my father the whole of his landed estate, and cut Charles Horton, whilom Ravenshoe, off with the comparatively insignificant sum of eighty thousand pounds, the amount of his funded property. Eh ! Lady Welter."

Adelaide actually bounded from her chair.

"Are you drunk, Welter ? " she said.

"Seeing that it is but the third hour of the day, I am not, Lady Welter. Neither am I a fool. Lord Saltire would clear my father now, if he did not know that it would be more for my benefit than his. I believe he would sooner leave his money to a hospital than see me get one farthing of it."

"Welter," said Adelaide, eagerly, "if Charles gets hold of Lord Saltire again, he will have the whole ; the old man adores him. I know it ; I see it all now ; why did I never think of it before ? He thinks he is like Lord Barkham, his son. There is time yet. If that man, William Ravenshoe, comes this morning, you must know nothing of Charles. Mind that. Nothing. They must not meet. He may forget him. Mind, Welter, no answer !"

She was walking up and down the room rapidly now, and Lord Welter was looking at her with a satirical smile on his face.

"Lady Welter," he said, "the man, William Ravenshoe, has been here, and has got his answer. By this time, Charles is receiving his lordship's blessing."

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"Fool!" was all that Adelaide could say.

"Well, hardly that," said Lord Welter. "At least, *you* should hardly call me so. I understood the position of affairs long before you. I was a reckless young cub not to have paid Lord Saltire more court in old times; but I never knew the state of our affairs till very shortly before the crash came, or I might have done so. In the present case, I have not been such a fool. Charles is restored to Lord Saltire through my instrumentality. A very good basis of operations, Lady Welter."

"At a risk of about half a million of money," remarked Adelaide.

"There was no risk in the other course, certainly," said Lord Welter, "for we should never have seen a farthing of it. And besides, Lady Welter —"

"Well!"

"I have your attention. Good. It may seem strange to you, who care about no one in heaven or earth, but I love this fellow, this Charles Horton. I always did. He is worth all the men I ever met put together. I am glad to have been able to give him a lift this morning. Even if I had not been helping myself, I should have done it all the same. That is comical, is it not? For Lord Saltire's landed property I shall fight. The campaign begins at lunch to-day, Lady Welter; so, if you will be so good as to put on your full war-paint and feathers, we will dig up the tomahawk, and be off on the war-trail in your ladyship's brougham. Good-bye for the present."

Adelaide was beaten. She was getting afraid of her husband; afraid of his strong masculine cunning, of his reckless courage, and of the strange apparition of a great brutal *heart* at the bottom of it all. What were all her fine-spun female cobwebs worth against such a huge, blundering, thieving, hornet as he?

To Lunch with Lord Ascot

Chapter X

To Lunch with Lord Ascot

THAT same day, Lord Saltire and Lady Ascot were sitting in the drawing-room window, in South Audley Street, alone. He had come in, as his custom was, about eleven, and found her reading her great old Bible; he had taken up the paper and read away for a time, saying that he would not interrupt her; she, too, had seemed glad to avoid a *tête-à-tête* conversation, and had continued; but, after a few minutes, he had dropped the paper, and cried —

“The deuce!”

“My dear James,” said she, “what is the matter?”

“Matter! why, we have lost a war-steamer, almost without a shot fired. The Russians have got the *Tiger*, crew and all. It is unbearable, Maria; if they are going to blunder like this at the beginning, where will it end?”

Lord Saltire was disgusted with the war from the very beginning, in consequence of the French alliance, and so the present accident was as fuel for his wrath. Lady Ascot, as loyal a soul as lived, was possibly rather glad that something had taken up Lord Saltire's attention just then, for she was rather afraid of him this morning. She knew his great dislike for Lord Welter, and expected to be scolded for her weakness with regard to Adelaide the night before. Moreover, she had the guilty consciousness that she had asked Adelaide to come to lunch that morning, of which he did not yet know. So she was rather glad to have a subject to talk of, not personal.

“And when did it happen, my dear James?” she asked.

“On the twelfth of last month, Lady Ascot. Come and sit here in the window, and give an account of yourself, will you have the goodness?”

Now that she saw it must come, she was as cool and as careless as need be. He could not be hard on her. Charles

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was to come home to them that day. She drew her chair up, and laid her withered old hand on his, and the two grey heads were bent together. Grey heads but green hearts.

"Look at old Daventry," said Lord Saltire, "on the other side of the way. Don't you see him, Maria, listening to that organ? He is two years older than I am. He looks younger."

"I don't know that he does. He ought to look older. She led him a terrible life. Have you been to see him lately?"

"What business is that of yours? So you are going to take Welter's wife back into your good graces, eh, my lady?"

"Yes, James."

"'Yes, James!' — I have no patience with you. You are weaker than water. Well, well, we must forgive her, I suppose. She has behaved generous enough about Charles, has she not? I rather admire her scolding poor William Ravenshoe. I must renew our acquaintance."

"She is coming to lunch to-day."

"I thought you looked guilty. Is Welter coming?"

Lady Ascot made no reply. Neither at that moment would Lord Saltire have heard her if she had. He was totally absorbed in the proceedings of his old friend Lord Daventry, before mentioned. That venerable dandy had listened to the organ until the man had played all his tunes twice through, when he had given him half a crown, and the man had departed. Immediately afterwards, a Punch and Judy had come, which Punch and Judy was evidently an acquaintance of his; for, on descrying him, it had hurried on with its attendant crowd, and breathlessly pitched itself in front of him, let down its green curtains, and plunged at once *in medias res*. The back of the show was towards Lord Saltire; but, just as he saw Punch look round the corner, to see which way the Devil was gone, he saw two pickpockets advance on Lord Daventry from

To Lunch with Lord Ascot

different quarters, with fell intentions. They met at his tail-coat pocket, quarrelled, and fought. A policeman bore down on them; Lord Daventry was still unconscious, staring his eyes out of his head. The affair was becoming exciting, when Lord Saltire felt a warm tear drop on his hand.

"James," said Lady Ascot, "don't be hard on Welter. I love Welter. There is good in him; there is, indeed. I know how shamefully he has behaved; but don't be hard on him, James."

"My dearest Maria," said Lord Saltire, "I would not give you one moment's uneasiness for the world. I do not like Welter. I dislike him. But I will treat him for your sake and Ascot's as though I loved him — there. Now about Charles. He will be with us to-day, thank God. What the deuce are we to do?"

"I cannot conceive," said Lady Ascot; "it is such a terrible puzzle. One does not like to move, and yet it seems such a sin to stand still."

"No answer to your advertisement, of course?" said Lord Saltire.

"None whatever. It seems strange, too, with such a reward as we have offered; but it was worded so cautiously, you see."

Lord Saltire laughed. "Cautiously, indeed. No one could possibly guess what it was about. It was a miracle of obscurity; but it won't do to go any further yet." After a pause, he said — "You are perfectly certain of your facts, Maria, for the fiftieth time."

"Perfectly certain. I committed a great crime, James. I did it for Alicia's sake. Think what my bringing up had been, how young I was, and forgive me if you can; excuse me if you cannot."

"Nonsense about a great crime, Maria. It was a great mistake, certainly. If you had only the courage to have asked Petre one simple question! Alicia never guessed the fact, of course?"

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"Never."

"Do you think, Maria, that by any wild possibility James or Norah knew?"

"How could they possibly? What a foolish question."

"I don't know. Those Roman Catholics do strange things," said Lord Saltire, staring out of window at the crowd.

"If she knew, why did she change the child?"

"Eh?" said Lord Saltire, turning round.

"You have not been attending," said Lady Ascot.

"No, I have not," said Lord Saltire; "I was looking at Daventry."

"Do you still," said Lord Saltire, "since all our researches and failures, stick to the belief that the place was in Hampshire?"

"I do indeed, and in the north of Hampshire too."

"I wonder," said Lord Saltire, turning round suddenly, "whether Mackworth knows?"

"Of course he does," said Lady Ascot, quietly.

"Hum," said Lord Saltire, "I had a hold over that man once; but I threw it away as being worthless. I wish I had made a bargain for my information. But what nonsense; how can he know?"

"Know?" said Lady Ascot, scornfully; "what is there a confessor don't know? Don't tell me that all Mackworth's power came from finding out poor Densil's *faux pas*. The man had a sense of power other than that."

"Then he never used it," said Lord Saltire. "Densil, dear soul, never knew."

"I said a *sense* of power," said Lady Ascot, "which gave him his consummate impudence. Densil never dreamt of it."

At this point the policeman had succeeded in capturing the two pickpockets, and was charging them before Lord Daventry. Lord Daventry audibly offered them ten shillings a-piece to say nothing about it; at which the crowd cheered.

To Lunch with Lord Ascot

"Would it be any use to offer money to the priest — say ten thousand pounds or so?" said Lord Saltire. "You are a religious woman, Maria, and as such are a better judge of a priest's conscience than I. What do you think?"

"I don't know," said Lady Ascot. "I don't know but what the man is high-minded, in his heathenish way. You know Cuthbert's story of his having refused ten thousand pounds to hush up the matter about Charles. His information would be a blow to the Popish Church in the West. He would lose position by accepting your offer. I don't know what his position may be worth. You can try him, if all else fails; not otherwise, I should say. We must have a closer search."

"When you come to think, Maria, he can't know. If Densil did not know, how could he?"

"Old Clifford might have known, and told him."

"If we are successful, and if Adelaide has no children — two improbable things —" said Lord Saltire, "why then —"

"Why, then —" said Lady Ascot. "But at the worst you are going to make Charles a rich man. Shall you tell William?"

"Not yet. Cuthbert should never be told, I say; but that is Charles's business. I have prepared William."

"Cuthbert will not live," said Lady Ascot.

"Not a chance of it, I believe. Marston says his heart-complaint does not exist, but I think differently."

At this moment, Lord Daventry's offer of money having been refused, the whole crowd moved off in procession towards the police-station. First came three little girls with big bonnets and babies, who, trying to do two things at once — to wit, head the procession by superior speed, and at the same time look round at Lord Daventry and the pickpockets — succeeded in neither, but only brought the three babies' heads in violent collision every other step.

Ravenshoe

Next came Lord Daventry, resigned. Next the policeman with a pickpocket in each hand, who were giving explanations. Next the boys; after them, the Punch and Judy, which had unfortunately seen the attempt made, and must to the station as a witness, to the detriment of business. Bringing up the rear were the British public, who played practical jokes with one another. The dogs kept a parallel course in the gutter, and barked. In turning the first corner, the procession was cut into, and for a time thrown into confusion, by a light-hearted costermonger, who, returning from a successful market with an empty barrow, drove it in among them with considerable velocity. After which, they disappeared like the baseless fabric of a dream, only to be heard of again in the police reports.

“Lord and Lady Welter.”

Lord Saltire had seen them drive up to the door; so he was quite prepared. He had been laughing intensely, but quite silently, at poor Lord Daventry's adventures, and so, when he turned round he had a smile on his face. Adelaide had done kissing Lady Ascot, and was still holding both her hands with a look of intense mournful affection. Lord Saltire was so much amused by Adelaide's acting, and by her simplicity in performing before himself, that, when he advanced to Lord Welter, he was perfectly radiant.

“Well, my dear scapegrace, and how do *you* do?” he said, giving his hand to Lord Welter; “a more ill-mannered fellow I never saw in my life. To go away and hide yourself with that lovely young wife of yours, and leave all us oldsters to bore one another to death. What the deuce do you mean by it? Eh, sir?”

Lord Welter did not reply in the same strain. He said —

“It is very kind of you to receive me like this. I did not expect it. Allow me to tell you, that I think your manner towards me would not be quite so cordial if you knew everything; there is a great deal that you don't know, and which I don't mean to tell you.”

To Lunch with Lord Ascot

It is sometimes quite impossible, even for a writer of fiction, a man with *carte blanche* in the way of invention, to give the cause for a man's actions. I have thought and thought, and I cannot for the life of me tell you why Lord Welter answered Lord Saltire like that, whether it was from deep cunning or merely from recklessness. If it was cunning, it was cunning of a high order. It was genius. The mixture of respect and kindness towards the person, and of carelessness about his favour was — well — very creditable. Lord Saltire did not think he was acting, and his opinion is of some value, I believe. But then, we must remember that he was prepared to think the best of Lord Welter that day, and must make allowances. I am not prepared with an opinion; let every man form his own. I only know that Lord Saltire tapped his teeth with his snuff-box and remained silent. Lord Welter, whether consciously or no, was nearer the half of a million of money than he had ever been before.

But Adelaide's finer sense was offended at her husband's method of proceeding. For one instant, when she heard him say what he did, she could have killed him. "Reckless, brutal, selfish," she said fiercely to herself, "throwing a duke's fortune to the winds by sheer obstinacy," (At this time she had picked up Lady Ascot's spectacles, and was playfully placing them on her venerable nose.) "I wish I had never seen him. He is maddening. If he only had some brains, where might not we be?" But the conversation of that morning came to her mind with a jar, and the suspicion with it, that he had more brains of a sort than she; that, though they were on a par in morality, there was a strength about him, against which her finesse was worthless. She knew she could never deceive Lord Saltire, and there was Lord Saltire tapping him on the knee with his snuff-box, and talking earnestly and confidentially to him. She was beginning to respect her husband. *He* dared face that terrible old man with his hundreds of thousands; *she* trembled in his presence.

Ravenshoe

Let us leave her, fooling our dear old friend to the top of her bent, and hear what the men were saying.

"I know you have been, as they say now, 'very fast,'" said Lord Saltire, drawing nearer to him. "I don't want to ask any questions which don't concern me. You have sense enough to know that it is worth your while to stand well with me. Will you answer me a few questions which do concern me?"

"I can make no promises, Lord Saltire. Let me hear what they are, will you?"

"Why," said Lord Saltire, "about Charles Ravenshoe."

"About Charles!" said Lord Welter, looking up at Lord Saltire. "Oh, yes; any number. I have nothing to conceal there. Of course you will know everything. I had sooner you knew it from me than another."

"I don't mean about Adelaide; let that go by. Perhaps I am glad that that is as it is. But have you known where Charles was lately? Your wife told William to come to her this morning; that is why I ask."

"I have known a very short time. When William Ravenshoe came this morning, I gave him every information. Charles will be with you to-day."

"I am satisfied."

"I don't care to justify myself, but if it had not been for me you would never have seen him. And more. I am not the first man, Lord Saltire, who has done what I have done."

"No, of course not," said Lord Saltire. "I can't fling the first stone at you; God forgive me."

"But you must see, Lord Saltire, that I could not have guessed that Ellen was his sister."

"Hey?" said Lord Saltire. "Say that again."

"I say that, when I took Ellen Horton away from Ravenshoe, I did not know that she was Charles's sister."

Lord Saltire fell back in his chair, and said —

"Good God!"

"It is very terrible, looked at one way, Lord Saltire. If

To Lunch with Lord Ascot

you come to look at it another, it amounts to this, that she was only, as far as I know, a gamekeeper's daughter. Do you remember what you said to Charles and me, when we were rusticated ? ”

“ Yes. I said that one vice was considered more venial than another vice now-a-days ; and I say so still. I had sooner that you had died of delirium tremens in a ditch than done this.”

“ So had not I, Lord Saltire. When I became involved with Adelaide, I thought Ellen was provided for ; I, even then, had not heard this *esclandre* about Charles. She refused a splendid offer of marriage before she left me.”

“ We thought she was dead. Where is she gone ? ”

“ I have no idea. She refused everything. She stayed on as Adelaide's maid, and left us suddenly. We have lost all trace of her.”

“ What a miserable, dreadful business ! ” said Lord Saltire.

“ Very so,” said Lord Welter. “ Hadn't we better change the subject, my lord ? ” he added dryly. “ I am not at all sure that I shall submit to much more cross-questioning. You must not push me too far, or I shall get savage.”

“ I won't,” said Lord Saltire. “ But, Welter, for God's sake, answer me two more questions. Not offensive ones, on my honour.”

“ Fifty, if you will ; only consider my rascally temper.”

“ Yes, yes ! When Ellen was with you, did she ever hint that she was in possession of any information about the Ravenshoes ? ”

“ Yes ; or rather, when she went, she left a letter, and in it she said that she had something to tell Charles.”

“ Good, good ! ” said Lord Saltire. “ She may know. We must find her. Now, Charles is coming here to-day. Had you better meet him, Welter ? ”

“ We have met before. All that is past is forgiven between us.”

Ravenshoe

"Met!" said Lord Saltire eagerly. "And what did he say to you? Was there a scene, Welter?"

Lord Welter paused before he answered, and Lord Saltire, the wise, looked out of the window. Once Lord Welter seemed going to speak, but there was a catch in his breath. The second attempt was more fortunate. He said, in a low voice —

"Why, I'll tell you, my Lord. Charles Ravenshoe is broken-hearted."

"Lord and Lady Hainault."

And Miss Corby, and Gus, and Flora, and Archy, the footman might have added, but was probably afraid of spoiling his period.

It was rather awkward. They were totally unexpected, and Lord Hainault and Lord Welter had not met since Lord Hainault had denounced Lord Welter at Tattersall's. It was so terribly awkward that Lord Saltire recovered his spirits, and looked at the two young men with a smile. The young men disappointed him, however, for Lord Hainault said, "How d'ye do, Welter?" and Lord Welter said, "How do, Hainault?" and the matter was settled, at all events for the present.

When all salutations had been exchanged among the ladies, and Archy had hoisted himself up into Mary's lap, and Lady Hainault had imperially settled herself in a chair, with Flora at her knee, exactly opposite Adelaide, there was a silence for a moment, during which it became apparent that Gus had a question to ask of Lady Ascot. Mary trembled, but the others were not quite sorry to have the silence broken. Gus, having obtained leave of the house, wished to know, whether or not Satan, should he repent of his sins, would have a chance of regaining his former position?

"That silly Scotch nursemaid has been reading Burns's poems to him, I suppose," said Lady Hainault; "unless Mary herself has been doing so. Mary prefers anything to Watts's hymns, Lady Ascot."

To Lunch with Lord Ascot

"You must not believe one word Lady Hainault says, Lady Ascot," said Mary. "She has been shamefully worsted in an argument, and she is resorting to all sorts of unfair means to turn the scales. I never read a word of Burns's poems in my life."

"You will be pleased not to believe a single word Miss Corby says, Lady Ascot," said Lady Hainault. "She has convicted herself. She sings 'The banks and braes of bonny Doon' — very badly, I will allow, but still she sings it."

There was a laugh at this. Anything was better than the silence which had gone before. It became evident that Lady Hainault would not speak to Adelaide. It was very uncomfortable. Dear Mary would have got up another friendly passage of arms with Lady Hainault, but she was too nervous. She would have even drawn out Gus, but she saw that Gus, dear fellow, was not in a humour to be trusted that morning. He evidently was aware that the dogs of war were loose, and was champing the bit like a war-horse. Lady Ascot was as nervous as Mary, dying to say something, but unable. Lady Hainault was calmly inexorable, Adelaide sublimely indifferent. If you will also consider that Lady Ascot was awaiting news of Charles — nay, possibly Charles himself — and that, in asking Adelaide to lunch, she had overlooked the probability that William would bring him back with him — that Lord Welter had come without invitation, and that the Hainaults were totally unexpected — you will think that the dear old lady was in about as uncomfortable a position as she could be, and that any event, even the house catching fire, must change matters for the better.

Not at all. They say that, when things come to the worst, they must mend. That is undeniable. But when are they at the worst? Who can tell that? Lady Ascot thought they were at the worst now, and was taking comfort. And then the footman threw open the door, and announced —

Ravenshoe

"Lady Hainault and Miss Hicks."

At this point Lady Ascot lost her temper, and exclaimed aloud, "This is too much!" They thought old Lady Hainault did not hear her; but she did, and so did Hicks. They heard it fast enough, and remembered it too.

In great social catastrophes, minor differences are forgotten. In the Indian mutiny, people spoke to one another, and made friends, who were at bitterest variance before. There are crises so terrible that people of all creeds and shades of political opinion must combine against a common enemy. This was one. When this dreadful old woman made her totally unexpected entrance, and when Lady Ascot showed herself so entirely without discretion as to exclaim aloud in the way she did, young Lady Hainault and Adelaide were so horrified, so suddenly quickened to a sense of impending danger, that they began talking loudly and somewhat affectionately to one another. And young Lady Hainault, whose self-possession was scattered to the four winds by this last misfortune, began asking Adelaide all about Lady Brittlejug's drum, in full hearing of her mamma-in-law, who treasured up every word she said. And, just as she became conscious of saying wildly that she was so sorry she could not have been there — as if Lady Brittlejug would ever have had the impudence to ask her — she saw Lord Saltire, across the room, looking quietly at her, with the expression on his face of one of the idols at Abou Simbel.

Turn Lady Ascot once fairly to bay, you would (if you can forgive slang) get very little change out of her. She came of valiant blood. No Headstall was ever yet known to refuse his fence. Even her poor brother, showing as he did traces of worn-out blood (the men always go a generation or two before the women), had been a desperate rider, offered to kick Fouquier Tinville at his trial, and had kept Simon waiting on the guillotine while he pared his nails. Her ladyship rose and accepted battle;

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she advanced towards old Lady Hainault, and, leaning on her crutched stick, began —

“And how do you do, my dear Lady Hainault?”

She thought Lady Hainault would say something very disagreeable, as she usually did. She looked at her, and was surprised to see how altered she was. There was something about her looks that Lady Ascot did not like.

“My dear Lady Ascot,” said old Lady Hainault, “I thank you. I am a very old woman. I never forget my friends, I assure you. Hicks, is Lord Hainault here? — I am very blind, you will be glad to hear, Lady Ascot. Hicks, I want Lord Hainault instantly. Fetch him to me, you stupid woman! Hainault! Hainault!”

Our Lady Hainault rose suddenly, and put her arm round her waist. “Mamma,” she said, “what do you want?”

“I want Hainault, you foolish girl. Is that him? Hainault, I have made the will, my dear boy. The rogue came to me, and I told him that the will was made, and that Britten and Sloane had witnessed it. Did I do right or not, eh? Ha! ha! I followed you here to tell you. Don't let that woman Ascot insult me, Hainault. She has committed a felony, that woman. I'll have her prosecuted. And all to get that chit Alicia married to that pale-faced papist, Peter Ravenshoe. She thinks I didn't know it, does she? I knew she knew it well enough, and I knew it too, and I have committed a felony too, in holding my tongue, and we'll both go to Bridewell, and —”

Lord Saltire here came up, and quietly offered her his arm. She took it and departed, muttering to herself.

I must mention here, that the circumstance mentioned by old Lady Hainault, of having made a will, has nothing to do with the story. A will had existed to the detriment of Lady Hainault and Miss Hicks, and she had most honourably made another in their favour.

Lady Ascot would have given worlds to unsay many things she had heretofore said to her. It was evident that

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poor old Lady Hainault's mind was failing. Lady Ascot would have prayed her forgiveness on her knees, but it was too late. Lady Hainault never appeared in public again. She died a short time after this, and, as I mentioned before, left poor Miss Hicks a rich woman. Very few people knew how much good there was in the poor old soul. Let the Casterton tenantry testify.

On this occasion her appearance had, as we have seen, the effect of reconciling Lady Hainault and Adelaide. A very few minutes after her departure William entered the room, followed by Hornby, whom none of them had ever seen before.

They saw from William's face that something fresh was the matter. He introduced Hornby, who seemed concerned, and then gave an open note to Lord Saltire. He read it over, and then said —

"This unhappy boy has disappeared again. Apparently his interview with you determined him, my dear Lady Welter. Can you give us any clue? This is his letter: " —

"DEAR LIEUTENANT, — I must say good-bye even to you, my last friend. I was recognised in your service to-day by Lady Welter, and it will not do for me to stay in it any longer. It was a piece of madness ever taking to such a line of life."

[Here there were three lines carefully erased. Lord Saltire mentioned it, and Hornby quietly said, "I erased those lines previous to showing the letter to any one; they referred to exceedingly private matters." Lord Saltire bowed, and continued,]

"A hundred thanks for your kindness; you have been to me more like a brother than a master. We shall meet again, when you little expect it. Pray don't assist in any search after me; it will be quite useless.

CHARLES HORTON."

Adelaide came forward as pale as death. "I believe I am the cause of this. I did not dream it would have made

To Lunch with Lord Ascot

him alter his resolution so suddenly. When I saw him yesterday he was in a groom's livery. I told him he was disgracing himself, and told him, if he was desperate to go to the war."

They looked at one another in silence.

"Then," Lady Ascot said, "he has enlisted, I suppose. I wonder in what regiment? — could it be in yours, Mr. Hornby?"

"The very last in which he would, I should say," said Hornby, "if he wants to conceal himself. He must know that I should find him at once."

So Lady Ascot was greatly pooh-poohed by the other wiseacres, she being right all the time.

"I think," said Lord Saltire to Lady Ascot, "that perhaps we had better take Mr. Hornby into our confidence." She agreed, and, after the Hainaults and Welters were gone, Hornby remained behind with them, and heard things which rather surprised him.

"Inquiries at the dépôts of various regiments would be as good a plan as any. Meanwhile I will give any assistance in my power. Pray, would it not be a good plan to advertise for him, and state all the circumstances of the case?"

"Why, no," said Lord Saltire, "we do not wish to make known all the circumstances yet. Other interests have to be consulted, and our information is not yet complete. Complete! we have nothing to go on but mere surmise."

"You will think me inquisitive," said Hornby. "But you little know what a right (I had almost said) I have to ask these questions. Does the present Mr. Ravenshoe know of all this?"

"Not one word."

And so Hornby departed with William, and said nothing at all about Ellen. As they left the door a little shoe-black looked inquisitively at them, and seemed as though he would speak. They did not notice the child. He could have told them what they wanted to know, but how were they to guess that?

Ravenshoe

Impossible. Actually, according to the sagacious Welter, half a million pounds, and other things, going a-begging, and a dirty little shoe-black the only human being who knew where the heir was! A pig is an obstinate animal, likewise a sheep; but what pig or sheep was ever so provoking in its obstinacy as Charles in his good-natured, well-meaning, blundering stupidity? In a very short time you will read an advertisement put into the *Times* by Lady Ascot's solicitor, which will show you the reason for some of the great anxiety which she and others felt to have him on the spot. At first Lady Ascot and Lord Saltire lamented his absence, from the hearty goodwill they bore him; but, as time wore on, they began to get deeply solicitous for his return for other reasons. Lady Ascot's hands were tied. She was in a quandary, and, when the intelligence came of his having enlisted, and there seemed nearly a certainty of his being shipped off to foreign parts, and killed before she could get at him, she was in a still greater quandary. Suppose, before being killed, he was to marry some one? "Good heavens, my dear James, was ever an unfortunate wretch punished so before for keeping a secret?"

"I should say not, Maria," said Lord Saltire coolly. "I declare I love the lad better the more trouble he gives one. There never was such a dear obstinate dog. Welter has been making his court, and has made it well — with an air of ruffian-like simplicity, which was charming, because novel. I, even I, can hardly tell whether it was real or not. He has ten times the brains of his shallow-pated little wife, whose manœuvres, my dear Maria, I should have thought even you, not ordinarily a sagacious person, might have seen through."

"I believe the girl loves me; and don't be rude, James."

"I believe she don't care twopence for you; and I shall be as rude as I please, Maria."

Poor Lord Ascot had a laugh at this little battle between

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his mother and her old friend. So Lord Saltire turned to him and said —

“At half-past one to-morrow morning, you will be awakened by three ruffians in crape masks, with pistols, who will take you out of bed with horrid threats, and walk you upstairs and down in your shirt, until you have placed all your money and valuables into their hands. They will effect an entrance by removing a pane of glass, and introducing a small boy, disguised as a shoe-black, who will give them admittance.”

“Good Gad !” said Lord Ascot, “what are you talking about ?”

“Don’t you see that shoe-black over the way ?” said Lord Saltire. “He has been watching the house through two hours ; the burglars are going to put him in at the back-kitchen window. There comes Daventry back from the police station. I bet you a sovereign he has his boots cleaned.”

Poor Lord Ascot jumped at the bet like an old war-horse. “I’d have given you three to one if you had waited.”

Lord Daventry had indeed reappeared on the scene ; his sole attendant was one of the little girls with a big bonnet and a baby, before mentioned, who had evidently followed him to the police-station, watched him in, and then accompanied him home — staring at him as at a man of dark experiences, a man not to be lost sight of on any account, lest some new and exciting thing should befall him meanwhile. This young lady, having absented herself some two hours on this errand, and having thereby deprived the baby of its natural nourishment, was now suddenly encountered by an angry mother, and, knowing what she had to expect, was forced to “dodge” her infuriated parent round and round Lord Daventry, in a way which made that venerable nobleman giddy, and caused him to stop, shut his eyes, and feebly offer them money not to do it any more. Ultimately the young lady was caught

Ravenshoe

and cuffed, the baby was refreshed, and his lordship free.

Lord Saltire won his pound, to his great delight. Such an event as a shoe-black in South Audley Street was not to be passed by. Lord Daventry entered into conversation with our little friend, asked him if he went to school? if he could say the Lord's Prayer? how much he made in the day? whether his parents were alive? and ultimately had his boots cleaned, and gave the boy half-a-crown. After which he disappeared from the scene, and, like many of our large staff of supernumeraries, from this history for evermore — he has served his turn with us. Let us dismiss the kind-hearted old dandy, with our best wishes.

Lord Saltire saw him give the boy the half-crown. He saw the boy pocket it as though it were a half-penny; and afterwards continue to watch the house, as before. He was more sure than ever that the boy meant no good. If he had known that he was waiting for one chance of seeing Charles again, perhaps he would have given him half-a-crown himself. What a difference one word from that boy would have made in our story!

When they came back from dinner, there was the boy still lying on the pavement, leaning against his box. The little girl who had had her ears boxed came and talked to him for a time, and went on. After a time she came back with a quartern loaf in her hand, the crumbs of which she picked as she went along, after the manner of children sent on an errand to the baker's. When she had gone by, he rose and leant against the railings, as though lingering, loth to go.

Once more, later, Lord Saltire looked out, and the boy was still there. "I wonder what the poor little rogue wants?" said Lord Saltire; "I have half a mind to go and ask him." But he did not. It was not to be, my lord. You might have been with Charles the next morning at Windsor. You might have been in time if you had;

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you will have a different sort of meeting with him than that, if you meet him at all. Beyond the grave, my lord, that meeting must be. Possibly a happier one, who knows ? who dare say ?

The summer night closed in, but the boy lingered yet, to see, if perchance he might, the only friend he ever had ; to hear, if he might, the only voice which had ever spoken gently and kindly to him of higher things : the only voice which had told him that strange, wild tale, scarce believed as yet, of a glorious immortality.

The streets began to get empty. The people passed him —

“ Ones and twos,

And groups ; the latest said the night grew chill,
And hastened ; but he loitered ; whilst the dews
Fell fast, he loitered still.”

Chapter XI

Lady Hainault's Blotting-Book

IN the natural course of events, I ought now to follow Charles in his military career, step by step. But the fact is that I know no more about the details of horse-soldiering than a marine, and, therefore, I cannot. It is within the bounds of possibility that the reader may congratulate himself on my ignorance, and it may also be possible that he has good reason for so doing.

Within a fortnight after Hornby's introduction to Lord Saltire and Lady Ascot, he was off with the head-quarters of his regiment to Varna. The dépôt was at Windsor, and there, unknown to Hornby, was Charles, drilling and drilling. Two more troops were to follow the head-quarters in a short time, and so well had Charles stuck to his duty that he was considered fit to take his place in one of them. Before his moustaches were properly grown, he found himself a soldier in good earnest.

Ravenshoe

In all his troubles this was the happiest time he had, for he had got rid of the feeling that he was a disgraced man. If he must wear a livery, he would wear the Queen's; there was no disgrace in that. He was a soldier, and he would be a hero. Sometimes, perhaps, he thought for a moment that he, with his two thousand pounds worth of education, might have been better employed than in littering a horse, and swash-buckling about among the Wind-sor taverns; but he did not think long about it. If there were any disgrace in the matter, there was a time coming soon, by all accounts, when the disgrace would be wiped out in fire and blood. On Sunday, when he saw the Eton lads streaming up to the terrace, the old Shrewsbury days, and the past generally, used to come back to him rather unpleasantly; but the bugle put it all out of his head again in a moment. Were there not the three most famous armies in the world gathering, gathering, for a feast of ravens? Was not the world looking on in silence and awe, to see England, France, and Russia locked in a death-grip? Was not he to make one at the merry meeting? Who could think at such a time as this?

The time was getting short now. In five days they were to start for Southampton, to follow the head-quarters to Constantinople, to Varna, and so into the dark thunder-cloud beyond. He felt as certain that he would never come back again, as that the sun would rise on the morrow.

He made the last energetic effort that he made at all. It was like the last struggle of a drowning man. He says that the way it happened was this. And I believe him, for it was one of his own mad impulses, and, like all his other impulses, it came too late. They came branking into some pot-house, half a dozen of them, and talked loud about this and that, and one young lad among them said, that "he would give a thousand pounds, if he had it, to see his sister before he went away, for fear she should think that he had gone off without thinking of her."

Lady Hainault's Blotting-Book

Charles left them, and walked up the street. As he walked, his purpose grew. He went straight to the quarters of a certain cornet, son to the major of the regiment, and asked to speak to him.

The cornet, a quiet, smooth-faced boy, listened patiently to what he had to say, but shook his head and told him he feared it was impossible. But, he said, after a pause, he would help him all he could. The next morning he took him to the major while he was alone at breakfast, and Charles laid his case before him so well, that the kind old man gave him leave to go to London at four o'clock, and come back by the last train that same evening.

The Duchess of Cheshire's ball was the last and greatest which was given that season. It was, they say, in some sort like the Duchess of Richmond's ball before Waterloo. The story I have heard is that Lord George Barty persuaded his mother to give it, because he was sure that it would be the last ball he should ever dance at. At all events the ball was given, and he was right; for he sailed in the same ship with Charles four days after, and was killed at Balaclava. However, we have nothing to do with that. All we have to do with is the fact, that it was a very great ball indeed, and that Lady Hainault was going to it.

Some traditions and customs grow by degrees into laws, ay, and into laws less frequently broken than those made and provided by Parliament. Allow people to walk across the corner of one of your fields for twenty years, and there is a right of way, and they may walk across that field till the crack of doom. Allow a man to build a hut on your property, and live in it for twenty years, and you can't get rid of him. He gains a right there. (I never was annoyed in either of these ways myself, for reasons which I decline to mention; but it is the law, I believe.) There is no law to make the young men fire off guns at one's gate on the 5th of November, but they never

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miss doing it. (I found some of the men using their rifles for this purpose last year, and had to fulminate about it.) To follow out the argument, there was no rule in Lord Hainault's house that the children should always come in and see their aunt dress for a ball. But they always did; and Lady Hainault herself, though she could be perfectly determined, never dared to question their right.

They behaved very well. Flora brought in a broken picture-broom, which, stuck into an old straw hat of Archy's, served her for feathers. She also made unto herself a newspaper fan. Gus had an old twelfth-cake ornament on his breast for a star, and a tape round his neck for a garter. In this guise they represented the Duke and Duchess of Cheshire, and received their company in a corner, as good as gold. As for Archy, he nursed his cat, sucked his thumb, and looked at his aunt.

Mary was "by way of" helping Lady Hainault's maid, but she was very clumsy about it, and her hands shook a good deal. Lady Hainault, at last looking up, saw that she was deadly pale, and crying. So, instead of taking any notice, she dismissed the children as soon as she could, as a first step towards being left alone with Mary.

Gus and Flora, finding that they must go, changed the game, and made believe that they were at court, and that their aunt was the Queen. So they dexterously backed to the door and bowed themselves out. Archy was lord chamberlain, or gold stick, or what not, and had to follow them in the same way. He was less successful, for he had to walk backwards, sucking his thumb, and nursing his cat upside down (she was a patient cat, and was as much accustomed to be nursed that way as any other). He got on very well till he came to the door, when he fell on the back of his head, crushing his cat and biting his thumb to the bone. Gus and Flora picked him up, saying that lord chamberlains never cried when they fell on the backs of their heads. But Archy, poor dear, was obliged to cry a little, the more so as the dear cat had bolted upstairs, with

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her tail as big as a fox's, and Archy was afraid she was angry with him, which seemed quite possible. So Mary had to go out and take him to the nursery. He would stop his crying, he said, if she would tell him the story of Ivedy Avedy. So she told it him quite to the end, where the baffled old sorcerer, Gongolo, gets into the plate-warmer with his three farthings and the brass soup-ladle, shuts the door after him, and disappears for ever. After which she went down to Lady Hainault's room again.

Lady Hainault was alone now. She was sitting before her dressing-table, with her hands folded, apparently looking at herself in the glass. She took no notice of what she had seen; though, now they were alone together, she determined that Mary should tell her what was the matter — for, in truth, she was very anxious to know. She never looked at Mary when she came in; she only said —

“ Mary, my love, how do I look ? ”

“ I never saw you look so beautiful before,” said Mary.

“ I am glad of that. Hainault is so ridiculously proud of me, that I really delight in looking my best. Now, Mary, let me have the necklace; that is all, I believe, unless you would like me to put on a little rouge.”

Mary tried to laugh, but could not. Her hands were shaking so that the jewels were clicking together as she held them. Lady Hainault saw that she must help her to speak, but she had no occasion; the necklace helped her.

It was a very singular necklace, a Hainault heirloom, which Lady Hainault always wore on grand occasions to please her husband. There was no other necklace like it anywhere, though some folks who did not own it said it was old-fashioned, and should be reset. It was a collar of nine points, the ends of brilliants, running upwards as the points broadened into larger rose diamonds. The eye, catching the end of the points, was dazzled with yellow light, which faded into red as the rays of the larger roses overpowered the brilliants: and at the upper rim the soft crimson haze of light melted, overpowered, into nine blazing great rubies.

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It seemed, however, a shame to hide such a beautiful neck by such a glorious bauble.

Mary was trying to clasp it on, but her fingers failed, and down went the jewels clashing on the floor. The next moment she was down too, on her knees, clutching Lady Hainault's hand, and saying, or trying to say, in spite of a passionate burst of sobbing, "Lady Hainault, let me see him; let me see him, or I shall die."

Lady Hainault turned suddenly upon her, and laid her disengaged hand upon her hair. "My little darling," she said, "my pretty little bird."

"You must let me see him. You could not be so cruel. I always loved him, not like a sister, oh! not like a sister, woe to me. As you love Lord Hainault; I know it now."

"My poor little Mary. I always thought something of this kind."

"He is coming to-night. He sails to-morrow or next day, and I shall never see him again."

"Sails! where for?"

"I don't know; he does not say. But you must let me see him. He don't dream I care for him, Lady Hainault. But I must see him, or I shall die."

"You shall see him; but who is it? Any one I know?"

"Who is it? Who could it be but Charles Ravenshoe?"

"Good God! Coming here to-night! Mary, ring the bell for Alwright. Send round to South Audley Street for Lord Saltire, or William Ravenshoe, or some of them. They are dying to catch him. There is something more in their eagerness than you or I know of. Send at once, Mary, or we shall be too late. When does he come? Get up, my dear. My poor little Mary. I am so sorry. Is he coming here? And how soon will he come, dear? Do be calm. Think what we may do for him. He should be here now. Stay, I will write a note—just one

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line. Where is my blotting-book? Alwright, get my blotting-book. And stay; say that, if any one calls for Miss Corby, he is to be shown into the drawing-room at once. Let us go there, Mary."

Alwright had meanwhile, not having heard the last sentence, departed to the drawing-room, and possessed herself of Lady Hainault's portfolio, meaning to carry it up to the dressing-room; then she had remembered the message about any one calling being shown up to the drawing-room, and had gandered down to the hall to give it to the porter; after which she gandered upstairs to the dressing-room again, thinking that Lady Hainault was there, and missing both her and Mary from having gone downstairs. So, while she and Mary were looking for the blotting-book impatiently in the drawing-room, the door was opened, and the servant announced, "A gentleman to see Miss Corby."

He had discreetly said a gentleman, for he did not like to say an Hussar. Mary turned round and saw a man all scarlet and gold before her, and was frightened and did not know him. But when he said, "Mary," in the old, old voice, there came such a rush of bygone times, bygone words, scenes, sounds, meetings and partings, sorrows and joys, into her wild, warm little heart, that, with a low, loving, tender cry, she ran to him and hid her face on his bosom.*

And Lady Hainault swept out of the room after that unlucky blotting-book. And I intend to go after her, out of mere politeness, to help her to find it. I will not submit to be lectured for making an aposiopesis. If any think they could do this business better than I, let them

* As a matter of curiosity I tried to write this paragraph from the word "Mary," to the word "bosom," without using a single word derived from the Latin. After having taken all possible pains to do so, I found there were eight out of forty-eight. I think it is hardly possible to reduce the proportion lower, and I think it is undesirable to reduce it so low.

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communicate with the publishers ; and finish the story for themselves. I decline to go into that drawing-room at present. I shall wander upstairs into my lady's chamber, after that goosey-gander Alwright, and see what she has done with the blotting-book.

Lady Hainault found the idiot of a woman in her dressing-room, looking at herself in the glass, with the blotting-book under her arm. The maid looked as foolish as people generally do who are caught looking at themselves in the glass. (How disconcerting it is to be found standing on a chair before the chimney-glass, just to have a look at your entire figure before going to a party !) * But Lady Hainault said nothing to her ; but, taking the book from under her arm, she sat down and fiercely scrawled off a note to Lord Saltire, to be opened by any of them, to say that Charles Ravenshoe was then in her house, and to come in God's name.

"I have caged their bird for them," she said out loud when she had just finished and was folding up the letter ; "they will owe me a good turn for this."

The maid, who had no notion anything was the matter, had been surreptitiously looking in the glass again, and wondering whether her nose was really so very red after all. When Lady Hainault spoke thus aloud to herself, she gave a guilty start, and said, "Immediately, my lady," which you will perceive was not exactly appropriate to the occasion.

"Don't be a goose, my good old Alwright, and don't tread on my necklace, Alwright ; it is close at your feet."

So it was. Lying where Mary had dropped it. Alwright thought she must have knocked it off the dressing-table ; but, when Lady Hainault told her that Miss Corby had dropped it there, Alwright began to wonder why her ladyship had not thought it worth while to pick it up again.

"Put it on while I seal this letter, will you ? I cannot trust you, Alwright ; I must go myself." She went out of

* Which is a crib from Sir E. B. L. B. L.

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the room and quickly downstairs to the hall. All this had taken but a few minutes; she had hurried as much as was possible, but the time seems longer to us, because, following my usual plan of playing the fool on important occasions, I have been telling you about the lady-maid's nose. She went down quickly to the hall, and sent off one of the men to South Audley Street with her note, giving him orders to run all the way, and personally to see Lady Ascot, or some one else of those named. After this she came upstairs again.

When she came to the drawing-room door, Charles was standing at it. "Lady Hainault," he said, "would you come here, please? Poor Mary has fainted."

"Poor thing," said Lady Hainault. "I will come to her. One word, Mr. Ravenshoe. Oh, do think one instant of this fatal, miserable resolution of yours. Think how fond we have all been of you. Think of the love that your cousin and Lady Ascot bear for you, and communicate with them. At all events stay ten minutes more, and see one of them. I must go to poor Mary."

"Dear Lady Hainault, you will not change my resolution to stand alone. There is a source of disgrace you probably know nothing of. Besides, nothing short of an Order in Council could stop me now. We sail for the East in twenty-four hours."

They had just time for this, very hurriedly spoken, for poor little Mary had done what she never had done before in her life, fainted away. Lady Hainault and Charles went into the drawing-room.

Just before this, Alwright, coming downstairs, had seen her most sacred mistress standing at the drawing-room door, talking familiarly and earnestly to a common soldier. Her ladyship had taken his hand in hers, and was laying her other hand upon his breast. Alwright sat down on the stairs.

She was a poor feeble thing, and it was too much for her. She was Casterton-bred, and had a feeling for the

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honour of the family. Her first impulse was to run to Lord Hainault's dressing-room door and lock him in. Her next was to rock herself to and fro and moan. She followed the latter of these two impulses. Meanwhile, Lady Hainault had succeeded in bringing poor Mary to herself. Charles had seen her bending over the poor little lifeless body, and blessed her. Presently Lady Hainault said, "She is better now, Mr. Ravenshoe, will you come and speak to her?" There was no answer. Lady Hainault thought Charles was in the little drawing-room, and had not heard her. She went there. It was dimly lighted, but she saw in a moment that it was empty. She grew frightened, and hurriedly went out on to the stairs. There was no one there. She hurried down, and was met by the weeping Alwright.

"He is safe out of the house, my lady," said that brilliant genius. "I saw him come out of the drawing-room, and I ran down and sent the hall porter on a message, and let him out myself. Oh! my lady! my lady!"

Lady Hainault was a perfect-tempered woman, but she could not stand this. "Alwright," she said, "you are a perfect, hopeless, imbecile idiot. Go and tell his lordship to come to me instantly. Instantly! do you hear? I wouldn't," she continued to herself when Alwright was gone, "face Lord Saltire alone after this for a thousand pounds."

What was the result of Charles's interview with Mary? Simply this. The poor little thing had innocently shown him, in a way he could not mistake, that she loved him with all her heart and soul. And, when he left that room, he had sworn an oath to himself that he would use all his ingenuity to prevent her ever setting eyes on him again. "I am low and degraded enough now," he said to himself; "but if I gave that poor innocent child the opportunity of nourishing her love for me, I should be too low to live."

He did not contemplate the possibility, you see, of raising himself to her level. No. He was too much broken

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down for that. Hope was dead with him. He had always been a man of less than average strength of will ; and two or three disasters — terrible disasters they were, remember — had made him such as we see him, a helpless, drifting log upon the sea of chance. What Lord Welter had said was terribly true, "Charles Ravenshoe is broken-hearted." But to the very last he was a just, honourable, true, kind-hearted man. A man in ten thousand. Call him fool, if you will. I cannot gainsay you there. But when you have said that, you have finished.

Did he love Mary? Yes, from this time forward, he loved her as she loved him ; and, the darker the night grew, that star burned steadily and more steadily yet. Never brighter, perhaps, than when it gleamed on the turbid waters, which whelm the bodies of those to whose eyesight all stars have set for ever.

Chapter XII

In which Cuthbert begins to see things in a New Light

THE stream at Ravenshoe was as low as they had ever seen it, said the keeper's boys who were allowed to take artists and strangers up to see the waterfall in the wood. The artists said that it was more beautiful than ever ; for now, instead of roaring headlong over the rocks in one great sheet beneath the quivering oak leaves, it streamed and spouted over and among the black slabs of slate in a million interlacing jets. Yes, the artists were quite satisfied with the state of things ; but a few happy souls who had dared to ask Cuthbert for a day or so of salmon-fishing were not so well satisfied by any means. While the artists were saying that this sort of thing, you know, was the sort of thing to show one how true it was that beauty, life, and art, were terms co-ordinate, synonymous, inseparable — that these made up the sum of exist-

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ence — that the end of existence was love, and what was love but the worship of the beautiful (or something of this sort, for your artist is but a mortal man, like the rest of us, and is apt, if you give him plenty of tobacco on a hot day, to get uncommon hazy in his talk) — while, I say, the artists were working away like mad, and uttering the most beautiful sentiments in the world, the anglers were, as old Master Lee, up to Slarrow, would have said, “dratting” the scenery, the water, the weather, the beer, and existence generally, because it wouldn’t rain. If it had rained, you see, the artists would have left talking about the beautiful, and begun “dratting” in turn ; leaving the anglers to talk about the beautiful as best they might. Which fact gives rise to moral reflections of the profoundest sort. But every one, except the discontented anglers, would have said that it was heavenly summer weather. The hay was all got in without one drop of rain on it. And now, as one glorious, cloudless day succeeded another, all the land seemed silently swelling with the wealth of the harvest. Fed by gentle dews at night, warmed by the genial sun by day, the corn began to turn from grey to gold, and the distant valleys which spread away inland, folded in the mighty grey arms of the moor, shone out gallantly with acre beyond acre of yellow wheat and barley. A still, happy time.

And the sea ! Who shall tell the beauty of the restless Atlantic in such weather ? For nearly three weeks there was a gentle wind, now here, now there, which just curled the water, and made a purple shadow for such light clouds as crept across the blue sky above. Night and morning the fishing-boats crept out and in. Never was such a fishing season. The mouth of the stream was crowded with salmon, waiting to get up the first fresh. You might see them as you sailed across the shallow sand-bank, the Delta of the stream, which had never risen above the water for forty years, yet which now, so still had been the bay for three weeks, was within a foot of the surface at low tide.

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A quiet, happy time. The three old Master Lees lay all day on the sand, where the fishing-boats were drawn up, and had their meals brought to them by young male relatives, who immediately pulled off every rag of clothes they had, and went into the water for an hour or two. The minding of these 'ere clothes, and the looking out to sea, was quite enough employment for these three old cronies. They never fell out once for three weeks. They used to talk about the war, or the cholera, which was said to be here, or there, or coming, or gone. But they cared little about that. Ravenshoe was not a cholera place. It had never come there before, and they did not think that it was coming now. They were quite right; it never came. Cuthbert used his influence, and got the folks to move some cabbage stalks, and rotten fish, just to make sure as he said. They would have done more for him than that just now; so it was soon accomplished. The juvenile population, which is the pretty way of saying the children, might have offered considerable opposition to certain articles of merchandise being removed without due leave obtained and given; but, when it was done, they were all in the water as naked as they were born. When it was over they had good sense enough to see that it could not be helped. These sweeping measures of reform, however, are apt to bear hard on particular cases. For instance, young James Lee, great-grandson of Master James Lee, up to Slarrow, lost six dozen (some say nine, but that I don't believe) of oyster shells, which he was storing up for a grotto. Cuthbert very properly refunded the price of them, which amounted to two-pence.

"Nonsense, again," you say. Why, no! What I have written above is not nonsense. The whims and oddities of a village, which one has seen with one's own eyes, and heard with one's own ears, are not nonsense. I knew, when I began, what I had to say in this chapter, and I have just followed on a train of images. And the more readily, because I know that what I have to

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say in this chapter must be said without effort to be said well.

If I thought I was writing for a reader who was going to criticise closely my way of telling my story, I tell you the honest truth, I should tell my story very poorly indeed. Of course I must submit to the same criticism as my betters. But there are times when I feel that I must have my reader go hand in hand with me. To do so, he must follow the same train of ideas as I do. At such times I write as naturally as I can. I see that greater men than I have done the same. I see that Captain Marryat, for instance, at a particular part of his noblest novel, "The King's Own," has put in a chapter about his grandmother and the spring tides, which, for perfect English and rough humour, it is hard to match anywhere.

I have not dared to play the fool, as he has, for two reasons. The first, that I could not play it so well, and the second, that I have no frightful tragedy to put before you, to counterbalance it, as he had. Well, it is time that this rambling came to an end. I hope that I have not rambled too far, and bored you. That would be very unfortunate just now.

Ravenshoe bay again, then — in the pleasant summer drought I have been speaking of before. Father Mackworth and the two Tiernays were lying on the sand, looking to sea. Cuthbert had gone off to send away some boys who were bathing too near the mouth of the stream and hunting his precious salmon. The younger Tiernay had recently taken to collect "common objects of the shore" — a pleasant, healthy mania which prevailed about that time. He had been dabbling among the rocks at the western end of the bay, and had just joined his brother and Father Mackworth with a tin-box full of all sorts of creatures, and he turned them out on the sand and called their attention to them.

"A very good morning's work, my brother," he said. "These anemones are all good and rare ones."

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"Bedad," said the jolly priest, "they'd need be of some value, for they ain't pretty to look at; what's this cockle now wid the long red spike coming out of him?"

"*Cardium tuberculatum*."

"See here, Mackworth," said Tiernay, rolling over toward him on the sand with the shell in his hand. "Here's the rid-nosed oysther of Carlingford. Ye remember the legend about it, surely?"

"I don't, indeed," said Mackworth, angrily, pretty sure that Father Tiernay was going to talk nonsense, but not exactly knowing how to stop him.

"Not know the legend!" said Father Tiernay. "Why, when Saint Bridget was hurrying across the sand, to attend Saint Patrick in his last illness, poor dear, this divvle of a oysther was sunning himself on the shore, and, as she went by, he winked at her holiness with the wicked eye of 'um, and he says, says he, 'Nate ankles enough, anyhow,' he says. 'Ye-re drunk ye spalpeen,' says St. Bridget, 'to talk like that at an honest gentlewoman.' 'Sorra a bit of me,' says the oysther. 'Ye're always drunk,' says St. Bridget. 'Drunk yourself,' says the oysther; 'I'm fastin from licker since the tide went down.' 'What makes yer nose so red, ye scoundrel?' says St. Bridget. 'No ridder nor yer own,' says the oysther, getting angry. For the Saint was stricken in years, and red-nosed by rayson of being out in all weathers, seeing to this and to that. 'Yer nose is red through drink,' says she, 'and yer nose shall stay as rid as mine is now, till the day of judgment.' And that's the legend about St. Bridget and the Carlingford oysther, and ye ought to be ashamed that ye never heard it before."

"I wish, sir," said Mackworth, "that you could possibly stop yourself from talking this preposterous, indecent nonsense. Surely the first and noblest of Irish Saints may claim exemption from your clumsy wit."

"Begorra, L'm catching it, Mr. Ravenshoe," said Tiernay.

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"What for?" said Cuthbert, who had just come up.

"Why, for telling a legend. Sure, I made it up on the spot. But it is none the worse for that; d'ye think so now?"

"Not much the better, I should think," said Cuthbert, laughing.

"Allow me to say," said Mackworth, "that I never heard such shameless, blasphemous nonsense in my life."

The younger Tiernay was frightened, and began gathering up his shells and weeds. His handsome weak face was turned towards the great, strong, coarse face of his brother, with a look of terror, and his fingers trembled as he put the sea-spoils into his box. Cuthbert, watching them both, guessed that sometimes Father Tiernay could show a violent, headlong temper, and that his brother had seen an outbreak of this kind and trembled for one now. It was only a guess, possibly a good one; but there were no signs of such an outbreak now. Father Tiernay only lay back on the sand and laughed, without a cloud on his face.

"Bedad," he said, "I've been lying on the sand, and the sun has got into my stomach and made me talk nonsense. When I was a gossoon, I used to sleep with the pig; and it was a poor feeble-minded pig, as never got fat on petaty skins. If folly's catchin', I must have caught it from that pig. Did ye ever hear the legend of St. Laurence O'Toole's wooden-legged sow, Mackworth?"

It was evident, after this, that the more Mackworth fulminated against good Father Tiernay's unutterable nonsense, the more he would talk; so he rose and moved sulkily away. Cuthbert asked him, laughing, what the story was.

"Faix," said Tiernay, "I ain't sure, principally because I haven't had time to invent it; but we've got rid of Mackworth, and can now discourse reasonable."

Cuthbert sent a boy up to the hall for some towels, and then lay down on the sand beside Tiernay. He was very

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fond of that man in spite of his reckless Irish habit of talking nonsense. He was not alone there. I think that every one who knew Tiernay liked him.

They lay on the sand together, those three ; and, when Father Mackworth's anger had evaporated, he came back and lay beside him. Tiernay put his hand out to him, and Mackworth shook it, and they were reconciled. I believe Mackworth esteemed Tiernay, though they were so utterly unlike in character and feeling. I know that Tiernay had a certain admiration for Mackworth.

"Do you think, now," said Tiernay, "that you Englishmen enjoy such a scene and such a time as this as much as we Irishmen do ? I cannot tell. You talk better about it. You have a dozen poets to our one. Our best poet, I take it, is Tommy Moore. You class him as third-rate ; but I doubt, mind you, whether you feel nature so acutely as we do."

"I think we do," said Cuthbert, eagerly. "I cannot think that you can feel the beauty of the scene we are looking at more deeply than I do. You feel nature as in 'Silent O'Moyle;' we feel it as in Keats' 'St. Agnes' Eve.'"

He was sitting up on the sand, with his elbows on his knees, and his face buried in his hands. None of them spoke for a time ; and he, looking seaward, said, idly, in a low voice —

" 'St. Agnes' Eve. Ah ! bitter chill it was.
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold ;
The hare limped, trembling, through the frozen grass ;
And drowsy was the flock in woolly fold.' "

What was the poor lad thinking of ? God knows. There are times when one can't follow the train of a man's thoughts — only treasure up their spoken words as priceless relics.

His beautiful face was turned towards the dying sun, and in that face there was a look of such kindly, quiet

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peace, that they who watched it were silent, and waited to hear what he would say.

The western headland was black before the afternoon sun, and, far to sea, Lundy lay asleep in a golden haze. All before them the summer sea heaved between the capes, and along the sand, and broke in short crisp surf at their feet, gently moving the seaweed, the sand, and the shells.

"St. Agnes' Eve," he said again. "Ah, yes! that is one of the poems written by Protestants which help to make men Catholics. Nine-tenths of their highest religious imagery is taken from Catholicism. The English poets have nothing to supply the place of it. Milton felt it, and wrote about it; yes, after ranging through all heathendom for images, he comes home to us at last: —

" ' Let my due feet never fail
To walk the studious cloisters pale.
And love the high embowed roof,
With antique pillars massy proof,
And storied windows, richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light.' "

"Yes; he could feel for that cloister life. The highest form of human happiness! We have the poets with us, at all events. Why, what is the most perfect bijou of a poem in the English language? Tennyson's 'St. Agnes.' He had to come to us."

The poor fellow looked across the sea, which was breaking in crisp ripples at his feet among the seaweed, the sand, and the shells; and, as they listened, they heard him say, almost passionately —

" ' Break up the heavens, oh Lord! and far
Through all yon starlight keen
Draw me, thy bride, a glittering star
In raiment white and clean.' "

"They have taken our churches from us, and driven us into Birmingham-built chapels. They sneer at us, but they forget that we built their arches and stained their

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glass for them. Art has revenged herself on them for their sacrilege by quitting earth in disgust. They have robbed us of our churches and our revenues, and turned us out on the world. Ay, but we are revenged. They don't know the use of them now they have got them; and the only men who could teach them, the Tractarians, are abused and persecuted by them for their superior knowledge."

So he rambled on, looking seaward; at his feet the surf playing with the sand, the seaweed, and the shells.

He made a very long pause, and then, when they thought that he was thinking of something quite different, he suddenly said —

"I don't believe it matters whether a man is buried in the chancel, or out of it. But they are mad to discourage such a feeling as that, and not make use of it. Am I the worse man because I fancy that, when I lie there so quiet, I shall hear above my head the footfalls of those who go to kneel around the altar? What is it one of them says —

" ' Or where the kneeling hamlet drains,
The chalice of the grapes of God.' "

He very seldom spoke so much as this. They were surprised to hear him ramble on so; but it was an afternoon in which it was natural to sit upon the shore and talk, saying straight on just what came uppermost — a quiet, pleasant afternoon; an afternoon to lie upon the sand and conjure up old memories.

"I have been rambling, hav'n't I?" he said presently. "Have I been talking aloud, or only thinking?"

"You have been talking," said Tiernay, wondering at such a question.

"Have I? I thought I had been only thinking. I will go and bathe, I think, and clear my head from dreams. I must have been quoting poetry, then," he added, smiling.

"Ay, and quoting it well too," said Tiernay.

A young fisherman was waiting with a boat, and the

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lad had come with his towels. He stepped lazily across the sand to the boat, and they shoved off.

Besides the murmur of the surf upon the sand, playing with the shells and seaweed ; besides the shouting of the bathing boys ; besides the voices of the home-returning fishermen, carried sharp and distinct along the water ; besides the gentle chafing of the stream among the pebbles, was there no other sound upon the beach that afternoon ? Yes, a sound different to all these. A loud-sounding alarm drum, beating more rapidly and furiously each moment, but only heard by one man, and not heeded by him.

The tide drawing eastward, and a gentle wind following it, hardly enough to fill the sails of the lazy fishing-boats and keep them to their course. Here and there among the leeward part of the fleet, you might hear the sound of an oar working in the rowlocks, sleepily coming over the sea and mingling harmoniously with the rest.

The young man with Cuthbert rowed out a little distance, and then they saw Cuthbert standing in the prow undressing himself. The fishing-boats near him luffed and hurriedly put out oars, to keep away. The Squire was going to bathe, and no Ravenshoe man was ill-mannered enough to come near.

Those on the shore saw him standing stripped for one moment — a tall majestic figure. Then they saw him plunge into the water and begin swimming.

And then ; — it is an easy task to tell it. They saw his head go under water, and, though they started on their feet and waited till seconds grew to minutes and hope was dead, it never rose again. Without one cry, without one struggle, without even one last farewell wave of the hand, as the familiar old landscape faded on his eyes for ever, poor Cuthbert went down ; to be seen no more until the sea gave up its dead. The poor wild, passionate heart had fluttered itself to rest for ever.

The surf still gently playing with the sand, the sea changing from purple to grey, and from grey to black,

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under the fading twilight. The tide sweeping westward towards the tall black headland, towards the slender-curved thread of the new moon, which grew more brilliant as the sun dipped to his rest in the red Atlantic.

Groups of fishermen and sea boys and servants, that followed the ebbing tide as it went westward, peering into the crisping surf to see something they knew was there. One group that paused among the tumbled boulders on the edge of the retreating surges, under the dark promontory, and bent over something which lay at their feet.

The naked corpse of a young man, calm and beautiful in death, lying quiet and still between two rocks, softly pillowed on a bed of green and purple seaweed. And a priest that stood upon the shore, and cried wildly to the four winds of heaven, "Oh, my God, I loved him! My God! my God! I loved him!"

Chapter XIII

The Second Column of "The Times" of this Date, with other Matters

"TOMATO. Slam the door!"

"EDWARD. Come at once; poor Maria is in sad distress. Toodlekins stole!!!"

"J. B. can return to his deeply afflicted family if he likes, or remain away if he likes. The A F, one and all, will view either course with supreme indifference. Should he choose the former alternative, he is requested to be as quick as possible. If the latter, to send the key of the cellaret."

"LOST. A little black and tan lady's lap dog. Its real name is Pussy, but it will answer to the name of Toodlekins best. If any gentleman, living near Kensal Green or Kentish Town, should happen, perfectly accidentally of course, to have it in his possession, and would be so good as to bring it to 997, Sloane Street, I would give him a sovereign and welcome, and not a single question asked, upon my honour."

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It becomes evident to me that the dog Toodlekins, mentioned in the second advertisement, is the same dog alluded to in the fourth; unless you resort to the theory that two dogs were stolen on the same day, and that both were called Toodlekins. And you are hardly prepared to do that, I fancy. Consequently, you arrive at this, that the "Maria" of the second advertisement, is the "little black and tan lady" of the fourth. And that, in 1854, she lived at 997, Sloane Street. Who was she? Had she made a fortune by exhibiting herself in a caravan like Mrs. Gamp's spotted negress, and taken a house in Sloane Street, for herself, Toodlekins, and the person who advertised for Edward to come and comfort her? Again, who was Edward? Was he her brother? Was he something nearer and dearer? Was he enamoured of her person or her property? I fear the latter. Who could truly love a little black and tan lady?

Again. The wording of her advertisement gives rise to this train of thought. Two persons must always be concerned in stealing a dog — the person who steals the dog, and the person who has the dog stolen; because, if the dog did not belong to any one, it is evident that no one could steal it. To put it more scientifically, there must be an active and a passive agent. Now, I'll bet a dirty old dishcloth against the *New York Herald*, which is pretty even betting, that our little black and tan friend, Maria, had been passive agent in a dog-stealing case more than once before this, or why does she mention these two localities? But we must get on to the other advertisements.

"LOST. A large white bull-dog, very red about the eyes; desperately savage. Answers to the name of 'Billy.' The advertiser begs that any person finding him will be very careful not to irritate him. The best way of securing him is to make him pin another dog, and then tie his four legs together and muzzle him. Any one bringing him to the Coach and Horses, St. Martin's Lane, will be rewarded."

He seems to have been found the same day, and by

Second Column of "The Times"

some one who was a bit of a wag ; for the very next advertisement runs thus :

" **FOUND.** A large white bull-dog, very red about the eyes ; desperately savage. The owner can have him at once, by applying to Queen's Mews, Belgrave Street, and paying the price of the advertisement and the cost of a new pad groom, aged 18, as the dog has bitten one so severely about the knee that it is necessary to sell him at once to drive a cab."

" **LOST.** Somewhere between Mile-end Road and Putney Bridge, an old leathern purse, containing a counterfeit sixpence, a lock of hair in a paper, and a twenty-pound note. Any one bringing the note to 267, Tylney Street, Mayfair, may keep the purse and the rest of its contents for their trouble."

This was a very shabby advertisement. The next, though coming from an attorney's office, is much more munificent. It quite makes one's mouth water, and envy the lucky fellow who would answer it.

" **ONE HUNDRED GUINEAS REWARD.** Register wanted. To parish clerks. Any person who can discover the register of marriage between Petre Ravenshoe, Esq. of Ravenshoe, in the county of Devon, and Maria Dawson, which is supposed to have been solemnised in or about the year 1778, will receive the above reward, on communicating with Messrs. Compton and Brogden, solicitors, 2004, Lincoln's Inn Fields."

Tomato slammed the door as he was told. Edward dashed up to 997, Sloane Street, in a hansom cab, just as the little black and tan lady paid one sovereign to a gentleman in a velveteen shooting-coat, from Kentish town, and hugged Toodlekins to her bosom. J. B. came home to his afflicted family with the key of the cellaret. The white bull-dog was restored to the prize-fighter, and the groom lad received shin-plaster and was sent home tipsy. Nay, even an honest man, finding that the note was stopped, took it to Tylney Street and got a half-a-crown. But no one ever answered the advertisement of Lord Saltire's solicitor about the marriage register. The long summer dragged on. The square grew dry and dusty ; busi-

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ness grew slack, and the clerks grew idle ; but no one came. As they sat there drinking gingerbeer, and looking out at the parched lilacs and laburnums, talking about the theatres, and the war, and the cholera, it grew to be a joke with them. When any shabby man in black was seen coming across the square, they would say to one another, " Here comes the man to answer Lord Saltire's advertisement." Many men in black, shabby and smart, came across the square and into the office ; but none had a word to say about the marriage of Petre Ravenshoe with Maria Dawson, which took place in the year 1778.

Once, during that long, sad summer, the little shoe-black thought he would saunter up to the house in South Audley Street, before which he had waited so long one night to meet Charles, who had never come. Not perhaps with any hope. Only that he would like to see the place which his friend had appointed. He might come back there some day ; who could tell ?

Almost every house in South Audley Street had the shutters closed. When he came opposite Lord Ascot's house, he saw the shutters were closed there too. But more ; at the second story there was a great painted board hung edgeways, all scarlet and gold. There was some writing on it too, on a scroll. He could spell a little now, thanks to the ragged-school, and he spelt out " Christus Salvator meus." What could that mean ? he wondered.

There was an old woman in the area, holding two of the rails in her hands, and resting her chin on the kerbstone, looking along the hot desolate street. Our friend went over and spoke to her.

" I say, Missis," he said, " what's that thing up there ? "

" That's the scutching, my man," said she.

" The scutchings ! "

" Ah ! My Lord's dead. Died last Friday week, and they've took him down to the country house, to bury him."

" My Lord ? " said the boy ; " was he the one as used to wear top-boots, and went for a soger ? "

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The old woman had never seen my lord wear top-boots. Had hearn tell, though, as his father used to, and drive a coach and four in 'em. None on 'em hadn't gone for sogers, neither.

"But what's the scutching for?" asked the boy.

They put it up for a year, like for a monument, she said. She couldn't say what the writing on it meant. It was my lord's motter, that was all she knowd. And, being a tender-hearted old woman, and not having the fear of thieves before her eyes, she had taken him down into the kitchen, and fed him. When he returned to the upper regions, he was "collared" by a policeman, on a charge of "area sneaking," but, after explanations, was let go, to paddle home, barefooted, to the cholera-stricken court where he lived, little dreaming, poor lad, what an important part he was accidentally to play in this history hereafter.

They laid poor Lord Ascot to sleep in the chancel at Ranford, and Lady Ascot stood over the grave like a grey, old, storm-beaten tower. "It is strange, James," she said to Lord Saltire that day, "you and I being left like this, with the young ones going down around us like grass. Surely our summons must come soon, James. It's weary, weary waiting."

Chapter XIV

Shreds and Patches

LORD WELTER was now Lord Ascot. I was thinking at one time that I would continue to call him by his old title, as being the one most familiar to you. But, on second thoughts, I prefer to call him by his real name, as I see plainly that to follow the other course would produce still worse confusion. I only ask that you will bear his change of title in mind. The new Lady Ascot I shall continue to call Adelaide, choosing rather to incur the

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charge of undue familiarity with people so far above me in social position, than to be answerable for the inevitable confusion which would be caused by my speaking, so often as I shall have to speak, of two Ladies Ascot, with such a vast difference between them of age and character.

Colonel Whisker, a tenant of Lord Ascot's, had kindly placed his house at the disposal of his Lordship for his father's funeral. Never was there a more opportune act of civility, for Ranford was dismantled: and the doors of Casterton were as firmly closed to Adelaide as the gates of the great mosque at Ispahan to a Christian.

Two or three days after Lord Ascot's death, it was arranged that he should be buried at Ranford. That night the new Lord Ascot came to his wife's dressing-room, as usual, to plot and conspire.

"Ascot," said she, "they are all asked to Casterton for the funeral. Do you think she will ask me?"

"Oh dear, no," said Lord Ascot.

"Why not?" said Adelaide. "She ought to. She is civil enough to me."

"I tell you I know she won't. He and I were speaking about it to-day."

He was looking over her shoulder into the glass, and saw her bite her lip.

"Ah," said she. "And what did he say?"

"Oh, he came up in his infernal, cold, insolent way, and said that he should be delighted to see me at Casterton during the funeral, but Lady Hainault feared that she could hardly find rooms for Lady Ascot and her maid."

"Did you knock him down? Did you kick him? Did you take him by the throat and knock his hateful head against the wall?" said Adelaide, as quietly as if she was saying "How d'ye do?"

"No, my dear, I didn't," said Lord Ascot. "Partly, you see, because I did not know how Lord Saltire would take it. And remember, Adelaide, I always told you that it

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would take years, years, before people of that sort would receive you."

"What did you say to him?"

"Well, as much as you could expect me to say. I sneered as insolently, but much more coarsely than he could possibly sneer; and I said that I declined staying at any house where my wife was not received. And so we bowed and parted."

Adelaide turned round and said, "That was kind and manly of you, Welter. I thank you for that, Welter."

And so they went down to Colonel Whisker's cottage, for the funeral. The Colonel probably knew quite how the land lay, for he was a man of the world, and so he had done a very good-natured action just at the right time. She and Lord Ascot lived for a fortnight there, in the most charming style; and Adelaide used to make him laugh, by describing what it was possible the other party were doing up at solemn old Casterton. She used to put her nose in the air and imitate young Lady Hainault to perfection. At another time she would imitate old Lady Hainault and her disagreeable sayings equally well. She was very amusing that fortnight, though never affectionate. She knew that was useless; but she tried to keep Lord Ascot in good humour with her. She had a reason. She wanted to get his ear. She wanted him to confide entirely to her the exact state of affairs between Lord Saltire and himself. Here was Lord Ascot dead, Charles Ravenshoe probably at Alyden in the middle of the cholera, and Lord Saltire's vast fortune, so to speak, going a-begging. If he were to be clumsy now — now that the link formed by his father, Lord Ascot, between him and Lord Saltire was taken away — they were ruined indeed. And he was so terribly outspoken!

And so she strained her wits till her face grew sharp and thin, to keep him in good humour. She had a hard task at times; for there was something laying up in the deserted house at Ranford which made Lord Ascot gloomy and

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savage now and then, when he thought of it. I believe that the man, coarse and brutal as he was, loved his father, in his own way, very deeply.

A night or so after the funeral, there was a dressing-room conference between the two; and, as the conversation which ensued was very important, I must transcribe it carefully.

When he came up to her, she was sitting with her hands folded on her lap, looking so perfectly beautiful that Lord Ascot, astonished and anxious as he was at that moment, remarked it, and felt pleased at, and proud of, her beauty. A greater fool than she might probably have met him with a look of love. She did not. She only raised her great eyes to his, with a look of intelligent curiosity.

He drew a chair up close to her and said —

"I am going to make your hair stand bolt up on end, Adelaide, in spite of your bandoline."

"I don't think so," said she; but she looked startled, nevertheless.

"I am. What do you think of this?"

"This? I think that it is the *Times* newspaper. Is there anything in it?"

"Read," said he, and pointed to the list of deaths. She read.

"Drowned, while bathing in Ravenshoe Bay, Cuthbert Ravenshoe, Esq., of Ravenshoe Hall. In the faith that his forefathers bled and died for. — R.I.P."

"Poor fellow!" she said quietly. "So *he's* gone, and brother William, the groom, reigns in his stead. That is a piece of nonsense of the priests about their dying for the faith. I never heard that any of them did that. Also, isn't there something wrong about the grammar?"

"I can't say," said Lord Ascot. "I was at Eton, and hadn't the advantage that you had of learning English grammar. Did you ever play the game of trying to read the *Times* right across, from one column to another, and see what funny nonsense it makes?"

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"No. I should think it was good fun."

"Do it now."

She did. Exactly opposite the announcement of Cuthbert's death, was the advertisement we have seen before — Lord Saltire's advertisement for the missing register.

She was attentive and eager enough now. After a time, she said, "Oho!"

Lord Ascot said, "Hey! what do you think of that, Lady Ascot?"

"I am all abroad."

"I'll see if I can fetch you home again. Petre Ravenshoe, in 1778, married a milkmaid. She remembered the duties of her position so far as to conveniently die before one of the family knew what a fool he had made of himself; but so far forgot them, as to give birth to a boy, who lived to be one of the best shots, and one of the jolliest old cocks I ever saw — Old James, the Ravenshoe keeper. Now my dearly beloved grandmother Ascot is, at this present speaking, no less than eighty-six years old, and so, at the time of the occurrence, was a remarkably shrewd girl of ten. It appears that Petre Ravenshoe, sneaking away here and there with his pretty Protestant wife, out of the way of the priests, and finding life unendurable, not having had a single chance to confess his sins for two long years, came to the good-natured Sir Cingle Headstall, grandmamma's papa, and opened his griefs, trying to persuade him to break the matter to that fox-hunting old Turk of a father of his, Howard. Sir Cingle was too cowardly to face the old man for a time; and, before the pair of them could summon courage to speak, the poor young thing died at Manger Hall, where they had been staying with the Headstalls some months. This solved the difficulty, and nothing was said about the matter. Petre went home. They had heard reports about his living with a woman and having had a baby born. They asked very few questions about the child or his mother, and of course it was all forgotten conveniently,

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long before his marriage with my grandaunt, Lady Alicia Staunton, came on the tapis, which took place in 1782, when grandma was fourteen years of age. Now grandma had, as a girl of ten, heard this marriage of Petre Ravenshoe with Maria Dawson discussed in her presence, from every point of view, by her father and Petre. Night and morning, at bed-time, at meal-times, sober, and very frequently drunk. She had heard every possible particular. When she heard of his second marriage (my mouth is as dry as dust with this talking; ring the bell, and send your maid down for some claret and water) — when she heard of his second marriage, she never dreamt of saying anything, of course — a chit of fourteen with a great liability to having her ears boxed. So she held her tongue. When afterwards my grandfather made love to her, she held it the tighter, for my grandaunt's sake, of whom she was fond. Petre, after a time, had the boy James home to Ravenshoe, and kept him about his own person. He made him his gamekeeper, treated him with marked favour and so on; but the whole thing was a sort of misprision of felony, and poor silly old grandma was a party to it."

"You are telling this very well, Ascot," said Adelaide. "I will, as a reward, go so far out of my usual habits as to mix you some claret and water. I am not going to be tender, you know; but I'll do so much. Now that's a dear, good fellow; go on."

"Now comes something unimportant, but inexplicable. Old Lady Hainault knew it, and held *her* tongue. How or why is a mystery we cannot fathom, and don't want to. Grandma says that she would have married Petre herself, and that her hatred for grandma came from the belief that grandma could have stopped the marriage with my grandaunt by speaking. After it was over, she thinks that Lady Hainault had sufficient love left for Petre to hold her tongue. But this is nothing to the purpose. This James, the real heir of Ravenshoe, married an English

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girl, a daughter of a steward on one of our Irish estates, who had been born in Ireland and was called Norah. She was, you see, Irish enough at heart ; for she committed the bull of changing her own child, poor dear Charles, the real heir, for his youngest half-brother, William, by way of bettering his position, and then confessed the whole matter to the priest. Now this new discovery would blow the honest priest's boat out of the water ; but : — "

" Yes ! "

" Why, grandma can't, for the life of her, remember where they were married. She is certain that it was in the north of Hampshire, she says. Why or wherefore, she can't say. She says they resided the necessary time and were married by licence. She says she is sure of it, because she heard him, more than once, say to her father that he had been so careful of poor Maria's honour, that he sent her from Ravenshoe to the house of the clergyman who married them, who was a friend of his ; farther than this she knows nothing."

" Hence the advertisement, then. But why was it not inserted before ? "

" Why, it appears that, when the whole *esclandre* took place, and when you, my Lady Ascot, jilted the poor fellow for a man who is not worth his little finger, she communicated with Lord Saltire at once, and the result was that she began advertising in so mysterious a manner that the advertisement was wholly unintelligible. It appears that she and Lord Saltire agreed not to disturb Cuthbert till they were perfectly sure of everything. But, now he is dead, Lord Saltire has insisted on instantly advertising in a sensible way. So you see his advertisement appears actually in the same paper which contains Cuthbert's death, the news of which William got the night before last by telegraph."

" William, eh ? How does he like the cup being dashed from his lips like this ? "

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Lord Ascot laughed. "That ex-groom is a born fool, Lady Ascot. He loves his foster-brother better than nine thousand a year, Lady Ascot. He is going to start to Varna, and hunt him through the army and bring him back."

"It is incredible," said Adelaide.

"I don't know. I might have been such a fool myself once, who knows?"

"Who knows indeed," thought Adelaide, "who knows now?" "So," she said aloud, "Charles is heir of Ravenshoe after all."

"Yes. You were foolish to jilt him."

"I was. Is Alyden healthy?"

"You know it is not. Our fellows are dying like dogs."

"Do they know what regiment he is in?"

"They think, from Lady Hainault's and Mary Corby's description, that it is the 140th."

"Why did not William start on this expedition before?"

"I don't know. A new impulse. They have written to all sorts of commanding officers, but he won't turn up till he chooses, if I know him right."

"If William brings him back?"

"Why, then he'll come into nine, or more probably twelve thousand a year. For those tin lodes have turned up trumps."

"And the whole of Lord Saltire's property?"

"I suppose so."

"And we remain beggars?"

"I suppose so," said Lord Ascot. "It is time to go to bed, Lady Ascot."

This is exactly the proper place to give the results of William's expedition to Varna. He arrived there just after the army had gone forward. Some men were left behind invalided, among whom were two or three of the 140th. One of these William selected as being a likely man from whom to make inquiries.

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He was a young man, and, likely enough, a kind-hearted one; but when he found himself inquired of by a handsome, well-dressed young gentleman, obviously in search of a missing relative, a lying spirit entered into him, and he lied horribly. It appeared that he had been the intimate and cherished comrade of Charles Horton (of whom he had never heard in his life). That they had ridden together, drunk together, and slept side by side. That he had nursed him through the cholera, and then (seeing no other way out of the maze of falsehood in which he had entangled himself), that he assisted to bury him with his own hands. Lastly, lying on through mere recklessness, into desperation, and so into a kind of sublimity, he led William out of the town, and pointed out to him Charles's untimely grave. When he saw William pick some dry grass from the grave, when he saw him down on his knees, with his cheek on the earth, then he was sorry for what he had done. And, when he was alone, and saw William's shadow pass across the blazing white wall, for one instant, before he went under the dark gateway of the town, then the chinking gold pieces fell from his hand on the burning sandy ground, and he felt that he would have given them and ten times more, to have spoken the truth.

So Charles was dead and buried was he? Not quite yet, if you please. Who is this riding, one of a gallant train, along the shores of the bay of Eupatoria towards some dim blue mountains? Who is this that keeps looking each minute to the right, at the noble fleet which is keeping pace with the great scarlet and blue rainbow which men call the allied armies? At the great cloud of smoke floating angrily seaward, and the calm waters of the bay beaten into madness by three hundred throbbing propellers?

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Chapter XV

In which Charles comes to Life again

HA ! this was a life again. Better this than dawdling about at the heels of a dandy, or sitting on a wheelbarrow in a mews ! There is a scent here sweeter than that of the dung-hill, or the dandy's essences — what is it ? The smell of tar, and bilge water, and red herrings. There is a fresh whiff of air up this narrow street, which moves your hair, and makes your pulse quicken. It is the free wind of the sea. And at the end of the street are ships, from which comes the clinking of cranes ; pleasanter music sometimes than the song of nightingales.

Down the narrow street towards the wharf come the hussars. Charles is among them. On the wharf, in the confusion, foremost, as far as he dare, to assist. He was known as the best horseman in the troop, and, as such was put into dangerous places. He had attracted great attention among the officers by his fearlessness and dexterity. The captain had openly praised him ; and, when the last horse had been slung in, and the last cheer given, and the great ship was away down the river, on her message of wrath, and woe, and glory, Charles was looking back at Southampton spires, a new man with a new career before him.

The few months of degradation, of brooding misery, of listlessness and helplessness he had gone through, made this short episode in his life appear the most happy and most beautiful of all. The merest clod of a recruit in the regiment felt in some way ennobled and exalted ; but as for Charles, with his intensely sensitive, romantic nature, he was quite, as the French say, *tête montée*. The lowest menial drudgery was exalted and glorified. Groom his horse and help clean the deck ? Why not ? That horse

Charles comes to Life again

must carry him in the day of the merry meeting of heroes. Hard living, hard work, bad weather, disease, death : what were they, with his youth, health, strength, and nerve? Not to be thought of save with a smile. Yes ! this expedition of his to the Crimea was the noblest, and possibly the happiest in his life. To use a borrowed simile, it was like the mournful, beautiful autumn sunset, before the dark night closes in. He felt like a boy at midsummer, exploring some wood, or distant valley, watched from a distance long, and at last attained ; or as one feels when a stranger in a new land, one first rides forth alone into the forest on some distant expedition, and sees the new world, dreamt of and longed for all one's life, realized in all its beauty and wonder at last ; and expanding leaf by leaf before one. In a romantic state of mind. I can express it no better.

And really it is no wonder that a man, not sea-sick, should have been in a state of wonder, eager curiosity, kindness, and, above all, high excitement — which four states of mind, I take it, make up together the state of mind called romantic, quixotic, or chivalrous ; which is a very pleasant state of mind indeed. For curiosity, there was enough to make the dullest man curious. Where were they going? Where would the blow be struck? Where would the dogs of war first fix their teeth? Would it be a campaign in the field, or a siege, or what? For kindness : were not his comrades a good set of brave, free-hearted lads, and was not he the favourite among them? As for wonder and excitement, there was plenty of that, and it promised to last. Why, the ship herself was a wonder. The biggest in the world, carrying 500 men and horses ; and every man in the ship knew, before she had been five hours at sea, that that quiet-looking commander of hers was going to race her out under steam the whole way. Who could tire of wondering at the glimpse one got down the iron-railed well into the machinery, at the busy cranks and leaping pistons, or, when tired of that, at the strange dim vista of swinging horses between

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decks? Wonder and excitement enough here to keep twenty Don Quixotes going! Her very name too was romantic — HIMALAYA.

A north-east wind and a mountain of rustling white canvas over head. Blue water that seethed and creamed, and roared past to leeward. A calm, and the Lizard to the north, a dim grey cape. A south-west wind, and above a mighty cobweb of sail-less rigging. Top-gallant masts sent down and yards close hauled. Still, through it all, the busy clack and rattle of the untiring engine.

A dim wild sunset, and scudding prophet clouds that hurried from the west across the crimson zenith, like witches towards a sabbath. A wind that rose and grew as the sun went down, and hummed loud in the rigging as the bows of the ship dipped into the trough of the waves, and failed almost into silence as she raised them. A night of storm and terror; in the morning, the tumbling broken seas of Biscay. A few fruit brigs scudding wildly here and there; and a cape on a new land. A high round down, showing a gleam of green among the flying mists.

Sail set again before a northerly wind, and the ship rolling before it like a jolly drunkard. Then a dim cloud of smoke before them. Then the great steamer *Bussorah*, thundering forward against the wind, tearing furiously at the leaping seas with her iron teeth. A hurried glimpse of fluttering signals, and bare wet empty decks; and, before you had time to say what a noble ship she was, and what good weather she was making of it, only a cloud of smoke miles astern.

Now a dark line, too faint for landsmen's eyes, far a-head, which changed into a loom of land, which changed into a cloud, which changed into a dim peak towering above the sea mists, which changed into a tall crag, with a town, and endless tiers of white fortification — Gibraltar.

Then a strong west wind for three days, carrying the

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ship flying before it with all plain sail set. And each day, at noon, a great excitement on the quarter-deck, among the officers. On the third day much cheering and laughter, and shaking of hands with the commander. Charles, catching an opportunity, took leave to ask his little friend the cornet, what it meant. The *Himalaya* had run a thousand miles in sixty-three hours.*

And now at sunrise an island is in sight, flat, bald, blazing yellow in the morning sun, with a solitary flat-topped mass of buildings just in the centre, which the sailors say is *Civita Vecchia*; and, as they sweep round the southern point of it, a smooth bay opens, and there is a flat-roofed town rising in tiers from the green water — above heavier fortifications than those of Gibraltar, Charles thinks, but wrongly. Right and left, two great forts, *St. Elmo* and *St. Angelo*, say the sailors, and that flight of stone steps, winding up into the town, is the *Nix Mangare* stairs. A flood of historical recollections comes over Charles, and he recognises the place as one long known and very dear to him. On those very stairs, *Mr. Midshipman Easy* stood, and resolved that he would take a boat and sail to *Gozo*. What followed on his resolution is a matter of history. Other events have taken place at *Malta*, about which Charles was as well informed as the majority, but Charles did not think of them; not even of *St. Paul* and the viper, or the old windy dispute, and Greek Testament lecture, at *Oxford*, between this *Melita* and the other one off the coast of *Illyricum*. He thought of *Midshipman Easy*, and felt as if he had seen the place before.

I suppose that, if I knew my business properly, I should at this point represent Charles as falling down the companion-ladder and spraining his ancle, or as having over-

* The most famous voyage of the *Himalaya*, from *Cork* to *Varna* in twelve days, with the Fifth Dragoon Guards, took place in June. The voyage here described is, as will be perceived, a subsequent one, but equally successful, apparently.

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eaten himself, or something of that sort, and so pass over the rest of the voyage by saying that he was confined to his bunk, and saw no more of it. But I am going to do nothing of the sort, for two reasons. In the first place, because he did not do anything of the kind; and in the next, because he saw somebody at Constantinople, of whom I am sure you will be glad to hear again.

Charles had seen Tenedos golden in the east, and Lemnos purple in the west, as the sun went down; then, after having steamed at half-speed through the Dardanelles, was looking the next evening at Constantinople, and at the sun going down behind the minarets, and at all that sort of thing, which is no doubt very beautiful, but of which one seems to have heard once or twice before. The ship was lying at anchor, with fires banked, and it was understood that they were waiting for a Queen's messenger.

They could see their own boat, which they had sent to wait for him at Seraglio Point. One of the sailors had lent Charles a telescope — a regular old brute of a telescope, with a crack across the object-glass. Charles was looking at the boat with it, and suddenly said, "There he is."

He saw a small grey-headed man, with moustaches, come quickly down and get into the boat, followed by some Turks with his luggage. This was Colonel Oldhoss, the Queen's messenger; but there was another man with him, whom Charles recognised at once. He handed the telescope to the man next him, and walked up and down the deck rapidly.

"I *should* like to speak to him," he thought, "if it were only one word. Dear old fellow. But then he will betray me, and they will begin persecuting me at home dear souls. I suppose I had better not. No. If I am wounded and dying I will send for him. I will not speak to him now."

The Queen's messenger and his companion came on board, and the ship got under way and steamed through

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the Bosphorus out into the wild seething waves of the "Fena Kara degniz," and Charles turned in without having come near either of them. But in the chill morning, when the ship's head was north-west, and the dawn was flushing up on the distant Thracian sierra, Charles was on deck, and, while pausing for an instant in his duties, to look westward, and try to remember what country and what mountains lay to the north-west of Constantinople, a voice behind him said quietly, "Go find me Captain Croker, my man." He turned and was face to face with General Mainwaring.

It was only for an instant, but their eyes met; the general started, but he did not recognise him. Charles's moustache had altered him so much that it was no great wonder. He was afraid that the general would seek him out again, but he did not. These were busy times. They were at Varna that night.

Men were looking sourly at one another. The French expedition had just come in from Kustendji in a lamentable state, and the army was rotting in its inactivity. You know all about that as well as I can tell you; what is of more importance to us is, that Lieutenant Hornby had been down with typhus, and was recovering very slowly, so that Charles's chances of meeting him were very small.

What am I to do with this three weeks or more at Varna to which I have reduced Charles, you, and myself? Say as little about it as need be, I should say. Charles and his company were, of course, moved up at once to the cavalry camp at Devna, eighteen miles off, among the pleasant hills and woodlands. Once, his little friend, the young cornet, who had taken a fancy for him, made him come out shooting with him to carry his bag. And they scrambled and clambered, and they tore themselves with thorns, and they fell down steep places, and utterly forgot their social positions towards one another. And they tried to carry home every object which was new to them, including a live turtle and a basaltic column. And they saw a

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green lizard, who arched his tail and galloped away like a race-horse, and a grey lizard, who let down a bag under his chin and barked at them like a dog. And the cornet shot a quail, and a hare, and a long-tailed francolin, like a pheasant, and a wood-pigeon. And, lastly, they found out that, if you turned over the stones, there were scorpions under them, who tucked their claws under their arm-pits, as a man folds his arms, and sparred at them with their tails, drawing their sting in and out, as an experienced boxer moves his left hand when waiting for an attack. Altogether, they had a glorious day in a new country, and did not remember in what relation they were to one another till they topped the hill above Devna by moonlight, and saw the two long lakes, stretching towards the sea, broken here and there into silver ripples by the oars of the commissariat boats. A happy innocent school-boy day — the sort of day which never comes if we prepare for it and anticipate it, but which comes without warning, and is never forgotten.

Another day the cornet had business in Varna, and he managed that Charles should come with him as orderly ; and with him, as another orderly, went the young lad who spoke about his sister in the pot-house at Windsor : for this lad was another favourite of the cornet's, being a quiet gentlemanly lad, in fact a favourite with everybody. A very handsome lad, too. And the three went branking bravely down the hillside, through the woodlands, over the steaming plain, into the white dirty town. And the cornet must stay and dine with the mess of the 42d, and so Charles and the other lad might go where they would. And they went and bathed, and then, when they had dressed, they stood together under the burning white wall, looking over the wicked Black Sea, smoking. And Charles told his comrade about Ravenshoe, about the deer, and the pheasants, and the blackcock, and about the big trout that lay nosing up into the swift places, in the cool clear water. And suddenly the lad turned on him,

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with his handsome face livid with agony and horror, and clutched him convulsively by both arms, and prayed him, for God Almighty's sake——

There, that will do. We need not go on. The poor lad was dead in four hours. The cholera was very prevalent at Varna that month, and those who dawdled about in the hot sun, at the mouth of the filthy drains of that accursed hole, found it unto their cost. We were fighting, you see, to preserve the town to those worthless dirty Turks, against the valiant, noble, but, I fear, equally dirty Russians. The provoking part of the Russian war was, that all through we respected and liked our gallant enemies far more than we did the useless rogues for whom we were fighting. Moreover, our good friends the French seem to have been more struck by this absurdity than ourselves.

I only mentioned this sad little incident to show that this Devna life among the pleasant woodlands was not all sunshine ; that now and then Charles was reminded, by some tragedy like this, that vast masses of men were being removed from ordinary occupations and duties into an unusual and abnormal mode of life ; and that Nature was revenging herself for the violation of her laws.

You see that we have got through this three weeks more pleasantly than they did at Varna. Charles was sorry when the time came for breaking up the camp among the mountain woodlands. The more so, as it had got about among the men that they were only to take Sebastopol by a sudden attack in the rear, and spend the winter there. There would be no work for the cavalry, every one said.

It is just worthy of notice how, when one once begins a vagabond life, one gets attached to a place where one may chance to rest even for a week. When one gets accustomed to a change of locality every day for a long while, a week's pause gives one more familiarity with a place than a month's residence in a strange house would give if one were habitually stationary. This remark is

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almost a platitude, but just worth writing down. Charles liked Devna, and had got used to it, and parted from it as he would from a home.

This brings us up to the point where, after his death and burial, I have described him as riding along the shore of the Bay of Eupatoria, watching the fleet. The 140th had very little to do. They were on the extreme left; on the seventeenth they thought they were going to have some work, for they saw 150 of the lancers coming in, driving a lot of cattle before them, and about 1,000 Cossacks hanging on their rear. But, when some light dragoons rode leisurely out to support them, the Cossacks rode off, and the 140th was still condemned to inactivity.

Hornby had recovered, and was with the regiment. He had not recognised Charles, of course. Even if he had come face to face with him, it was almost unlikely that he would have recognised him in his moustache. They were not to meet as yet.

In the evening of the nineteenth there was a rumble of artillery over the hill in front of them, which died away in half an hour. Most of the rest of the cavalry were further to the front of the extreme left, and were "at it," so it was understood, with the Cossacks. But the 140th were still idle.

On the morning of the twentieth, Charles and the rest of them, sitting in their saddles, heard the guns booming in front and on the right. It became understood among the men that the fleet was attacking some batteries. Also, it was whispered that the Russians were going to stand and fight. Charles was sixth man from the right of the rear rank of the third troop. He could see the tails of the horses immediately before him, and could remark that his front-rank man had a great patch of oil on the right shoulder of his uniform. He could also see Hornby in the troop before him.

These guns went moaning on in the distance till half-past one; but still they sat there idle. About that time

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there was a new sound in the air, close on their right, which made them prick up their ears and look at one another. Even the head of the column could have seen nothing, for they were behind the hill. But all could hear, and guess. We all know that sound well enough now. You hear it now, thank God, on every village green in England when the cricket is over. Crack, crack ! Crack, crack ! The noise of advancing skirmishers.

And so it grew from the right towards the front, towards the left, till the air was filled with the shrill treble of musketry. Then, as the French skirmished within reach of the artillery, the deep bass roared up, and the men, who dared not whisper before, could shout at one another without rebuke.

Louder again, as our artillery came into range. All the air was tortured with concussion. Charles would have given ten years of his life to know what was going on on the other side of the hill. But no. There they sat, and he had to look at the back of the man before him ; and at this time he came to the conclusion that the patch of grease on his right shoulder was of the same shape as the map of Sweden.

A long weary two hours or more was spent like this. Charles, by looking forward and to the right, between the two right-hand men of the troop before him could see the ridge of the hill, and see the smoke rising from beyond it, and drifting away to the left before the seabreeze. He saw an aide-de-camp come over that ridge and dismount beside the captain of Hornby's troop, loosening his girths. They laughed together ; then the captain shouted to Hornby, and he laughed and waved his sword over his head. After this, he was reduced to watching the back of the man before him, and studying the map of Sweden. It was becoming evident that the map of North America, if it existed, must be on his left shoulder, under his hussar jacket, and that the Pacific Islands must be round in front, about his left breast, when the word was given to go forward.

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They advanced to the top of the hill, and wheeled. Charles, for one instant, had a glimpse of the valley below, seething and roaring like a volcano. Everywhere bright flashes of flame, single, or running along in lines, or blazing out in volleys. The smoke, driven to the left by the wind, hung across the valley like a curtain. On the opposite hill a ring of smoke and fire, and in front of it a thin scarlet line disappearing. That was all. The next moment they wheeled to the right, and Charles saw only the back of the man before him, and the patch of grease on his shoulder.

But that night was a night of spurs for them. Hard riding for them far into the night. The field of the Alma had been won, and they were ordered forward to harass the Cossacks, who were covering the rear of the Russian army. They never got near them. But ever after, when the battle of the Alma was mentioned before him, Charles at once used to begin thinking of the map of Sweden.

Chapter XVI

What Lord Saltire and Father Mackworth said when they looked out of the Window.

"AND how do you do, my dear sir?" said Lord Saltire.

"I enjoy the same perfect health as ever, I thank you, my lord," said Father Mackworth. "And allow me to say, that I am glad to see your lordship looking just the same as ever. You may have forgotten that you were the greatest benefactor that I ever had. I have not."

"Nay, nay," said Lord Saltire. "Let bygones be bygones, my dear sir. By-the-by, Mr. Mackworth — Lord Hainault."

"I am delighted to see you at Casterton, Mr. Mackworth," said Lord Hainault. "We are such rabid Prot-

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estants here, that the mere presence of a Catholic ecclesiastic of any kind is a source of pleasurable excitement to us. When, however, we get among us a man like you — a man of whose talents we have heard so much, and a man personally endeared to us, through the love he bore to one of us who is dead, we give him a threefold welcome."

Lord Saltire used, in his *tête-à-têtes* with Lady Ascot, to wish to Gad that Hainault would cure himself of making speeches. He was one of the best fellows in the world, but he would always talk as if he was in the House of Lords. This was very true about Lord Hainault; but, although he might be a little stilted in his speech, he meant every word he said, and was an affectionate, good-hearted man, and withal, a clever one.

Father Mackworth bowed, and was pleased with the compliment. His nerve was in perfect order, and he was glad to find that Lord Hainault was well inclined towards him, though just at this time the Most Noble the Marquis of Hainault was of less importance to him than one of the grooms in the stable. What he required of himself just now was to act and look in a particular way, and to do it naturally and without effort. His genius rose to the situation. He puzzled Lord Saltire.

"This is a sad business," said Lord Saltire.

"A bitter business," said Mackworth. "I loved that man, my lord."

He looked suddenly up as he said it, and Lord Saltire saw that he was in earnest. He waited for him to go on, watching him intently with his eyelids half dropped over his grey eagle eyes.

"That is not of much consequence, though," said Father Mackworth. "Speaking to a man of the world, what is more to the purpose is, to hear what is the reason of your lordship's having sought this interview. I am very anxious to know that, and so, if I appear rude, I must crave forgiveness."

Lord Saltire looked at him minutely and steadily. How

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Mackworth looked was of more importance to Lord Saltire than what he said. On the other hand, Mackworth every now and then calmly and steadily raised his eyes to Lord Saltire's, and kept them fixed there while he spoke to him.

"Not at all, my dear sir," said Lord Saltire. "If you will have business first, however, which is possibly the best plan, we will have it, and improve our acquaintance afterwards. I asked you to come to me to speak of family matters. You have seen our advertisement?"

"I have, indeed," said Mackworth, looking up with a smile. "I was utterly taken by surprise. Do you think that you can be right about this marriage?"

"Oh! I am sure of it," said Lord Saltire.

"I cannot believe it," said Mackworth. "And I'll tell you why. If it ever took place, I *must* have heard of it. Father Clifford, my predecessor, was Petre Ravenshoe's confessor. I need not tell you that he must have been in possession of the fact. Your knowledge of the world will tell you how impossible it is that, in a house so utterly priest-ridden as the house of Ravenshoe, an affair of such moment could be kept from the knowledge of the father-confessor. Especially when the delinquent, if I may so express myself, was the most foolishly bigoted, and cowardly representative of that house which had appeared for many generations. I assure you, upon my honor, that Clifford *must* have known it. And, if he had known of it, he must have communicated it to me. No priest could possibly have died without leaving such a secret to his successor; a secret which would make the owner of it — that is, the priest — so completely the master of Ravenshoe and all in it. I confessed that man on his deathbed, my lord," said Mackworth, looking quietly at Lord Saltire, with a smile, "and I can only tell you, if you can bring yourself to believe a priest, that there was not one word said about his marriage."

"No?" said Lord Saltire, pensively looking out of the window. "And yet Lady Ascot seems so positive."

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"I sincerely hope," said Mackworth, "that she may be wrong. It would be a sad thing for me. I am comfortable and happy at Ravenshoe. Poor dear Cuthbert has secured my position there during my lifetime. The present Mr. Ravenshoe is not so tractable as his brother, but I can get on well enough with him. But, in case of this story being true, and Mr. Charles Horton coming back, my position would be untenable, and Ravenshoe would be in Protestant hands for the first time in history. I should lose my home, and the Church would lose one of its best houses in the west. The best, in fact. I had sooner be at Ravenshoe than at Segur. I am very much pleased at your lordship's having sought this conference. It shows you have some trust in me, to consult me upon a matter in which my own interests are all on one side."

Lord Saltire bowed. "There is another way to look at the matter, too, my dear sir. If we prove our case, which is possible, and in case of our poor dear Charles dying or getting killed, which is probable, why then William comes in for the estate again. Suppose, now, such a possibility as his dying without heirs, why, then, Miss Ravenshoe is the greatest heiress in the west of England. Have you any idea where Miss Ravenshoe is?"

Both Lord Saltire and Lord Hainault turned on him as the former said this. For an instant Mackworth looked inquiringly from one to the other, with his lips slightly parted, and said, "Miss Ravenshoe?" Then he gave a half-smile of intelligence, and said, "Ah! yes; I was puzzled for a moment. Yes, in that case poor Ellen would be Miss Ravenshoe. Yes, and the estate would remain in Catholic hands. What a prospect for the Church! A penitent heiress! The management of 12,000*l.* a year! Forgive my being carried away for a moment. You know I am an enthusiastic Churchman. I have been bound, body and soul, to the Church from a child, and such a prospect, even in such remote perspective, has dazzled me. But I am afraid I shall see rather a large family of Ravens-

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hoes between me and such a consummation. William is going to marry."

"Then you do not know where poor Ellen is?" said Lord Saltire.

"I do not," said Mackworth; "but I shall certainly try to discover, and most certainly I shall succeed. William might die on this very expedition. You might prove your case. If anything were to happen to William, I most certainly hope you may, and will give you every assistance. For half a loaf is better than no bread. And beside, Charles also might be killed, or die of cholera. As it is, I shall not move in the matter. I shall not help you to bring a Protestant to Ravenshoe. Now don't think me a heartless man for talking like this; I am nothing of the kind. But I am talking to two very shrewd men of the world, and I talk as a man of the world; that is all."

At this point, Lord Hainault said, "What is that?" and left the room. Lord Saltire and Mackworth were alone together.

"Now, my dear sir," said Lord Saltire, "I am glad you have spoken merely as a man of the world. It makes matters so much easier. You could help us if you would."

Mackworth laughed. "Of course I could, my lord. I could bring the whole force of the Catholic Church, at my back, to give assistance. With our powers of organization, we could discover all about the marriage in no time (if it ever took place, which I don't choose to believe just now). Why it would pay us to search minutely every register in England, if it were to keep such a house in the hands of the Church. But the Catholic Church, in my poor person, politely declines to move all its vast machinery, to give away one of its best houses to a Protestant."

"I never supposed that the dear old lady would do anything of the kind. But, as for Mr. Mackworth, will nothing induce *him* to move *his* vast machinery in our *cause*?"

Lord Saltire and Father Mackworth

"I am all attention, my lord."

"In case of our finding Charles, then?"

"Yes," said Mackworth, calmly.

"Twenty thousand?"

"No," said Mackworth. "It wouldn't do. Twenty million wouldn't do. You see there is a difference between a soldier disguising himself, and going into the enemy's camp, to lie, and it may be, murder, to gain information for his own side, and the same soldier deserting to the enemy, and giving information. The one is a hero, and the other a rogue. I am a hero. You must forgive me putting matters so coarsely, but you distrust me so entirely that I am forced to do so."

"I do not think you have put it so coarsely," said Lord Saltire. "I have to ask your forgiveness for this offer of money, which you have so nobly refused. They say, every man has his price. If this is the case, yours is a very high one, and you should be valued accordingly."

"Now, my lord, before we conclude this interview, let me tell you two things, which may be of advantage to you. The first is, that you cannot buy a Jesuit."

"A Jesuit!"

"Ay. And the next thing is this. This marriage of Petre Ravenshoe is all a fiction of Lady Ascot's brain. I wish you good morning, my lord."

There are two sides to every door. You grant that. A man cannot be in two places at once. You grant that, without the exception made by the Irish member. Very well then. I am going to describe what took place on both sides of the library door at the conclusion of this interview. Which side shall I describe first?

That is entirely as I choose, and I choose to describe the outside first. The side where Father Mackworth was. This paragraph and the last are written in imitation of the Shandean-Southey-Doctorian style. The imitation is a bad one, I find, and approaches nearer to the lower style known among critics as Swivellerism; which consists in

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saying the first thing that comes into your head. Any style would be quite allowable, merely as a rest to one's aching brain, after the dreadfully keen encounter between Lord Saltire and Father Mackworth, recorded above.

When Mackworth had closed the library door behind him, he looked at it for a moment, as if to see it was safe, and then his whole face underwent a change. It grew haggard and anxious, and, as he parted his lips to moisten them, the lower one trembled. His eyes seemed to grow more prominent, and a leaden ring began to settle round them; he paused in a window, and raised his hand towards his head. When he had raised it half way he looked at it; it was shaking violently.

"I am not the man I was," he said. "These great field-days upset me. My nerve is going, God help me. It is lucky that I was really puzzled by his calling her Miss Ravenshoe. If I had not been all abroad, I could never have done so well. I must be very careful. My nerve ought not to go like this. I have lived a temperate life in every way. Possibly a little too temperate. I won't go through another interview of this kind without wine. It is not safe.

"The chances are ten to one in favour of one never hearing of Charles again. Shot and steel and cholera. Then William only to think of. In that case I am afraid I should like to bring in the elder branch of the family, to that young gentleman's detriment. I wish my nerve was better; this irritability increases on me in spite of all my care. I wish I could stand wine.

"Ravenshoe, with Ellen for its mistress, and Mackworth living there as her master! A penitential devotee, and a clever man for confessor! And twelve thousand a year! If we Jesuits were such villains as the Protestants try to make us out, Master William would be unwise to live in the house with me.

"I wonder if Lord Saltire guesses that I hold the clue *in my hand*. I can't remember the interview, or what I

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said. My memory begins to go. They should put a younger man in such a place. But I would not yield to another man. No. The stakes are too high. I wish I could remember what I said.

"Does William dream that, in case of Charles's death, he is standing between me and the light? At all events, Lord Saltire sees it. I wonder if I committed myself. I remember I was very honest and straightforward. What was it I said at last? I have an uneasy feeling about that, but I can't remember.

"I hope that Butler will keep the girl well in hand. If I was to get ill, it would all rest with him. God! I hope I shall not get ill."

Now we shall go to the other side of the door. Lord Saltire sat quietly upright in his chair until the door was safely closed. Then he took a pinch of snuff. He did not speak aloud, but he looked cunningly at the door, and said to himself —

"Odd!"

Another pinch of snuff. Then he said aloud, "Uncommon curious, by Ged."

"What is curious?" said Lord Hainault, who had come into the room.

"Why, that fellow. He took me in to the last moment. I thought he was going to be simply honest; but he betrayed himself by over-eagerness at the end. His look of frank honesty was assumed; the real man came out in the last sentence. You should have seen how his face changed, when he turned sharply on me, after fancying he had lulled suspicion to sleep, and told me that the marriage was a fiction. He forgot his manners for the first time, and laid his hand upon my knee."

Lord Hainault said, "Do you think that he knows about the marriage?"

"I am sure he does. And he knows where Ellen is."

"Why?"

"Because I am sure of it."

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"That is hardly a reason, my dear Lord Saltire. Don't you think, eh?"

"Think what?"

"Think that you are — well," said Lord Hainault, in a sort of desperation, "are not you, my dear lord, to put it very mildly, generalizing from an insufficient number of facts? I speak with all humility before one of the shrewdest men in Europe; but don't you think so?"

"No, I don't," said Lord Saltire.

"I bow," said Lord Hainault. "The chances are ten to one that you are right, and I am wrong. Did you make the offer?"

"Yes."

"And did he accept it?"

"Of course, he didn't. I told you he wouldn't."

"That is strange, is it not?"

"No," said Lord Saltire.

Lord Hainault laughed, and then Lord Saltire looked up and laughed too. "I like being rude to you, Hainault. You are so solemn."

"Well," said Lord Hainault, with another hearty laugh. "And what are we to do now?"

"Why, wait till William comes back," said Lord Saltire. "We can do nothing till then, my dear boy. God bless you, Hainault. You are a good fellow."

When the old man was left alone, he rose and looked out of the window. The bucks were feeding together close under the windows; and, farther off, under the shadow of the mighty cedars, the does and fawns were standing and lying about lazily, shaking their broad ears, and stamping their feet. Out from the great rhododendron thickets, right and left of the house, the pheasants were coming to spend the pleasant evening-tide in running to and fro, and scratching at the anthills. The rabbits too were showing out among the grass, scuttling about busily. The peacock had lit down from the stable roof, and was elegantly picking his way and dragging his

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sweeping train among the pheasants and the rabbits ; and on the topmost, copper-red, cedarboughs, some guinea fowl were noisily preparing for roost. One hundred yards from the window the park seemed to end, for it dipped suddenly down in a precipitous, almost perpendicular slope of turf, three hundred and fifty feet high, towards the river, which you could see winding on for miles through the richly wooded valley ; a broad riband of silver, far below. Beyond, wooded hills : on the left, endless folds of pearl-coloured downs ; to the right, the town, a fantastic grey and red heap of buildings, lying along from the river, which brimmed full up to its wharfs and lane ends ; and, over it, a lazy cloud of smoke, from which came the gentle booming of golden-toned bells.

Casterton is not a show-place. Lord Hainault has a whim about it. But you may see just such a scene, with variations, of course, from Park-place, or Hedsor, or Cliefden, or fifty other houses on the king of rivers. I wonder when the tour of the Thames will become fashionable. I have never seen anything like it, in its way. And I have seen a great many things.

Lord Saltire looked out on all this which I have roughly described (for a reason). And, as he looked, he spoke to himself, thus, or nearly so —

“ And so I am the last of them all ; and alone. Hardly one of them left. Hardly one. And their sons are feeding their pheasants, and planting their shrubberies still, as we did. And the things that were terrible realities for us, are only printed words for them, which they try to realize, but cannot. The thirty mad long years, through which we stood with our backs to the wall, are ticketed as ‘ the revolutionary wars,’ and put in a pigeon-hole. I wish they would do us justice. We *were* right. Hainault’s pheasants prove it. They must pay their twenty million a year, and thank us that they have got off so easy.

“ I wonder what *they* would do, in such a pinch as we

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had. They seem to be as brave as ever ; but I am afraid of their getting too much unbrutalized for another struggle like ours. I suppose I am wrong, for I am getting too old to appreciate new ideas, but I am afraid of our getting too soft. It is a by-gone prejudice, I am afraid. One comfort is, that such a struggle can never come again. If it did, they might have the will to do all that we did, and more, but have they the power ? This extension of the suffrage has played the devil, and now they want to extend it farther, the madmen ! They'll end by having a House full of Whigs. And then — why, then, I suppose, there'll be nothing but Whigs in the House. That seems to me near about what will happen. Well ! well ! I was a Whig myself once on a time.

“ All gone. Every one of them. And I left on here, in perfect health and preservation, as much an object of wonder to the young ones as a dodo would be to a poultry-fancier. Before the effect of our deeds has been fully felt, our persons have become strange, and out of date. And yet I, strange to say, don't want to go yet. I want to see that Ravenshoe boy again. Gad ! how I love that boy. He has just Barkham's sweet, gentle, foolish way with him. I determined to make him my heir from the first time I saw him at Ranford, if he turned out well. If I had announced it, everything would have gone right. What an endless series of unlucky accidents that poor boy has had.

“ Just like Barkham. The same idle, foolish, lovable creature, with anger for nothing ; only furious, blind indignation for injustice and wrong. I wish he would come back. I am getting weary of waiting.

“ I wonder if I shall see Barkham again, just to sit with my arm on his shoulder, as I used to on the terrace in old times. Only for one short half-hour —”

I shall leave off here. I don't want to follow the kind old heathen through his vague speculations about a future state. You see how he had loved his son. You

Captain Archer turns up

see why he loved Charles. That is all I wished to show you.

"And if Charles don't come back? By Gad! I am very much afraid the chances are against it. Well, I suppose, if the poor lad dies, I must leave the money to Welter and his wife, if it is only for the sake of poor Ascot, who was a good fellow. I wonder if we shall ever get to the bottom of this matter about the marriage. I fancy not, unless Charles dies, in which case Ellen will be reinstated by the priest.

"I hope William will make haste back with him. Old fellows like me are apt to go off in a minute. And if he dies, and I have not time to make a will, the whole goes to the Crown, which will be a bore. I would sooner Welter had it than that."

Lord Saltire stood looking out of the library window, until the river looked like a chain of crimson pools, stretching westward towards the sinking sun. The room behind him grew dark, and the marble pillars, which divided it in unequal portions, stood like ghosts in the gloom. He was hidden by the curtain, and presently he heard the door open, and a light footstep stealthily approaching over the Turkey carpet. There was a rustle of a woman's dress, and a moving of books on the centre table, by some hand which evidently feared detection. Lord Saltire stepped from behind his curtain, and confronted Mary Corby.

Chapter XVII

Captain Archer turns up

"Do not betray me, my lord," said Mary, from out of the gloom.

"I will declare your malpractices to the four winds of heaven, Miss Corby, as soon as I know what they are.

Ravenshoe

Why, why do you come rustling into the room like a mouse in the dark? Tell me at once what this hole-and-corner work means."

"I will not, unless you promise not to betray me, Lord Saltire."

"Now just think how foolish you are. How can I possibly make myself particeps, of what is evidently a most dark and nefarious business, without knowing beforehand what benefit I am to receive? You offer me no share of booty; you offer me no advantage, direct or indirect, in exchange for my silence, except that of being put in possession of facts which it is probably dangerous to know anything about. How can you expect to buy me on such terms as these?"

"Well, then, I will throw myself on your generosity. I want *Blackwood*. If I can find *Blackwood* now, I shall get a full hour at it to myself while you are all at dinner. Do you know where it is?"

"Yes," said Lord Saltire.

"Do tell me, please. I do so want to finish a story in it. Please to tell me where it is."

"I won't."

"Why not? How very unkind. We have been friends eight months now, and you are just beginning to be cross to me. You see how familiarity breeds contempt; you used to be so polite."

"I shan't tell you where *Blackwood* is," said Lord Saltire, "because I don't choose. I don't want you to have it. I want you to sit here in the dark and talk to me, instead of reading it."

"I will sit and talk to you in the dark; only you must not tell ghost stories."

"I want you to sit in the dark," said Lord Saltire, "because I want to be '*vox et præterea nihil*.' You will see why, directly. My dear Mary Corby, I want to have some very serious talk with you. Let us joke no more."

Mary settled herself at once into the arm-chair opposite

Captain Archer turns up

Lord Saltire, and, resting her cheek on her hand, turned her face towards the empty fire-place. "Now, my dear Lord Saltire," she said, "go on. I think I can anticipate what you are going to say."

"You mean about Charles."

"Yes."

"Ah, that is only a part of what I have to say. I want to consult you there, certainly; but that is but a small part of the business."

"Then I am curious."

"Do you know, then, I am between eighty and ninety years old?"

"I have heard so, my lord."

"Well then, I think that the voice to which you are now listening will soon be silent for ever; and do not take offence; consider it as a dead man's voice; if you will."

"I will listen to it as the voice of a kind living friend," said Mary. "A friend who has always treated me as a reasonable being and an equal."

"That is true, Mary; you are so gentle and so clever, that is no wonder. See here; you have no private fortune."

"I have my profession," said Mary, laughing.

"Yes, but your profession is one in which it is difficult to rise," said Lord Saltire, "and so I have thought it necessary to provide for you in my will. For I must make a new one."

Poor Mary gave a start. The announcement was so utterly unexpected. She did not know what to say, or what to think. She had had long night thoughts about poverty, old age, a life in a garret as a needlewoman, and so on; and had many a good cry over them, and had never found any remedy for them except saying her prayers, which she always found a perfect specific. And here, all of a sudden, was the question solved! She would have liked to thank Lord Saltire. She would have liked to kiss his hand; but words were rather deficient.

Ravenshoe

She tried to keep her tears back, and she in a way succeeded ; then in the honesty of her soul she spoke.

" I will thank you more heartily, my lord, than if I went down on my knees and kissed your feet. All my present has been darkened by a great cloud of old age and poverty in the distance. You have swept that cloud away. Can I say more ? "

" On your life, not another word. I could have overburdened you with wealth, but I have chosen not to do so. Twenty thousand pounds will enable you to live as you have been brought up. Believe an old man when he says that more would be a plague to you."

" Twenty thousand pounds ! "

" Yes. That will bring you in, you will find, about six hundred a year. Take my word for it, it is quite enough. You will be able to keep your brougham, and all that sort of thing. Believe me, you would not be so happy with more."

" More ! " said Mary quietly. " My lord, look here, and see what you have done. When the children are going to sleep, I sit, and sew, and sing, and, when they are gone to sleep, I still sit, and sew, and think. Then I build my Spanish castles ; but the highest tower of my castle has risen to this — that in my old age I should have ten shillings a week left me by some one, and be able to keep a canary bird, and have some old woman as pensioner. And now — now — now. Oh ! I'll be quiet in a moment. Don't speak to me for a moment. God is very good."

I hope Lord Saltire enjoyed his snuff. I think that, if he did not, he deserved to. After a pause Mary began again.

" Have I left on you the impression that I am selfish ? I am almost afraid I have. Is it not so ? I have one favour to ask of you. Will you grant it ? "

" Certainly I will."

" On your honour, my lord."

Captain Archer turns up

"On my honour."

"Reduce the sum you have mentioned to one-fourth. I have bound you by your honour. Oh, don't make me a great heiress ; I am not fit for it."

Lord Saltire said, "Pish ! If you say another word, I will leave you ten thousand more. To the deuce with my honour ; don't talk nonsense."

"You said you were going to be quiet in a moment," he resumed presently. "Are you quiet now ?"

"Yes, my lord ; quiet and happy."

"Are you glad I spoke to you in the dark ?"

"Yes."

"You will be more glad that it was in the dark directly. Is Charles Ravenshoe quite the same to you as other men ?"

"No," said Mary ; "that he most certainly is not. I could have answered that question *to you* in the brightest daylight."

"Humph !" said Lord Saltire. "I wish I could see him and you comfortably married, do you know ? I hope I speak plain enough. If I don't, perhaps you will be so good as to mention it, and I'll try to speak a little plainer."

"Nay ; I quite understand you. I wonder if you will understand me, when I say that such a thing is utterly and totally out of the question."

"I was afraid so. You are a pair of simpletons. My dear daughter (you must let me call you so), you must contemplate the contingency I have hinted at in the dark. I know that the best way to get a man rejected, is to recommend him ; I, therefore, only say, that John Marston loves you with his whole heart and soul, and that he is a *protégé* of mine."

"I am speaking to you as I would to my own father. John Marston asked me to be his wife last Christmas, and I refused him."

"Oh, yes. I knew all about that the same evening. It was the evening after they were nearly drowned out fishing. Then there is no hope of a reconsideration there ?"

Ravenshoe

"Not the least," said Mary. "My lord, I will never marry."

"I have not distressed you?"

"Certainly not. You have a right to speak as you have. I am not a silly hysterical girl either, that I cannot talk on such subjects without affectation. But I will never marry; I will be an old maid. I will write novels, or something of that sort. I will not even marry Captain Archer, charm he never so wisely."

"Captain Archer! Who on earth is Captain Archer?"

"Don't you know Captain Archer, my lord?" replied Mary, laughing heartily, but ending her laugh with a short sob. "Avast heaving! Bear a hand, my hearties, and let us light this taper. I think you ought to read his letter. He is the man who swam with me out of the cruel sea, when the *Warren Hastings* went down. That is who he is, Lord Saltire." And at this point, little Mary, thoroughly unhinged by this strange conversation, broke down, and began crying her eyes out, and, putting a letter into his hand, rose to leave the room.

He held the door open for her. "My dear Mary," he said, "if I have been coarse or rude, you must try to forgive me."

"Your straightforward kindness," she said, "is less confusing than the most delicate finesse." And so she went.

Captain Archer is one of the very best men I know. If you and I, reader, continue our acquaintance, you will soon know more of him than you have been able to gather from the pages of Ravenshoe. He was in person perhaps the grandest and handsomest fellow you ever saw. He was gentle, brave, and courteous. In short, the best example I have ever seen of the best class of sailor. By birth he was a gentleman, and he had carefully made himself a gentleman in manners. Neither from his dress, which was always scrupulously neat and in good taste, nor from his *conversation*, would you guess that he was a sailor, unless

Captain Archer turns up

in a very select circle, where he would, if he thought it pleased or amused, talk salt water by the yard. The reason why he had written to Mary in the following style was, that he knew she loved it, and he wished to make her laugh. Lord Saltire set him down for a mad seaman, and nothing more. You will see that he had so thoroughly obscured what he meant to say, that he left Mary with the very natural impression that he was going to propose to her.

He had done it, he said, from Port Philip Heads, in sixty-four days, at last, in consequence of one of his young gentlemen (merchant midshipmen) having stole a black cat in Flinder's-lane, and brought her aboard. He had caught the westerly wind off the Leuwin and carried it down to 62°, through the ice, and round the Horn, where he had met a cyclone, by special appointment, and carried the outside edge of it past the Auroras. That during this time it had blown so hard, that it was necessary for three midshipmen to be on deck with him night and day, to hold his hair on. That, getting too near the centre, he had found it necessary to lay her to, which he had successfully done, by tying one of his false collars in the fore weather-rigging. And so on. Giving an absurd account of his whole voyage, evidently with the intention of making her laugh.

He concluded thus : " And now, my dear Mary, I am going to surprise you. I am getting rich, and I am thinking of getting married. Have you ever thought of such a thing? Your present dependence must be irksome. Begin to contemplate a change to a happier and freer mode of life. I will explain more fully when I come to you. I shall have much to tell you which will surprise you; but you know I love you, and only study your happiness. When the first pang of breaking off old associations is over, the new life, to such a quiet spirit as yours, becomes at first bearable, then happy. A past is soon created. Think of what I have said, before I come to you. Your

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future, my dear, is not a very bright one. It is a source of great anxiety to me, who love you so dearly — you little know how dearly."

I appeal to any young lady to say whether or no dear Mary was to blame if she thought good, blundering Archer, was going to propose to her. If they give it against her, and declare that there is nothing in the above letter leading to such a conclusion, I can only say that Lord Saltire went with her and with me, and regarded the letter as written preparatory to a proposal. Archer's dismay, when we afterwards let him know this, was delightful to behold. His wife was put in possession of the fact, by some one who shall be nameless, and I have heard that jolly soul use her information against him in the most telling manner on critical occasions.

But, before Captain Archer came, there came a letter from William, from Varna, announcing Charles's death of cholera. There are melancholy scenes, more than enough, in this book, and alas! one more to come; so I may spare you the description of their woe at the intelligence, which we know to be false. The letter was closely followed by William himself, who showed them the grass from his grave. This helped to confirm their impression of its truth, however unreasonable. Lord Saltire had a correspondence with the Horse Guards, long and windy, which resulted, after months, in discovering that no man had enlisted in the 140th under the name of Horton. This proved nothing, for Charles might have enlisted under a false name, and yet might have been known by his real name to an intimate comrade.

Lord Saltire wrote to General Mainwaring. But, by the time his letter reached him, that had happened which made it easy for a fool to count on his fingers the number of men left in the 140th. Among the dead or among the living, no signs of Charles Ravenshoe.

General Mainwaring was, as we all know, wounded on Cathcart's Hill, and came home. The news which he

Captain Archer turns up

brought about the doings of the 140th we shall have from first hand. But he gave them no hope about Charles.

Lord Saltire and General Mainwaring had a long interview, and a long consultation. Lord Hainault and the General witnessed his will. There were some legacies to servants; twenty thousand pounds to Miss Corby; ten thousand to John Marston; fifty thousand pounds to Lady Ascot; and the rest, amounting in one way or another, to nearly five hundred thousand pounds, was left to Lord Ascot (our old acquaintance, Lord Welter) and his heirs forever.

There was another clause in the will, carefully worded — carefully guarded about by every legal fence which could be erected by law, and by money to buy that law — to the effect that, if Charles should reappear, he was to come into a fortune of eighty thousand pounds, funded property.

Now please to mark this. Lord Ascot was informed by General Mainwaring that, the death of Charles Ravenshoe being determined on as being a fact, Lord Saltire had made his will in his (Lord Ascot's) favour. I pray you to remember this. Lord Ascot knew no particulars, only that the will was in his favour. If you do not keep this in mind, it would be just as well if there had been no Lord Welter at all in the story.

Ravenshoe and its poor twelve thousand a year begin to sink into insignificance, you see. But still we must attend to it. How did Charles's death affect Mackworth? Rather favourably. The property could not come into the hands of a Protestant now. William was a staunch Catholic, though rebellious and disagreeable. If anything happened to him, why, then there was Ellen to be produced. Things might have been better, certainly, but they were certainly improved by that young cub's death, and by the cessation of all search for the marriage register. And so on. If you care to waste time on it, you may think it all through for yourselves, as did not Father Mackworth.

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And I'll tell you why. Father Mackworth had had a stroke of paralysis, as men will have, who lead, as he did, a life of worry and excitement, without taking proper nourishment; and he was lying, half idiotic, in the priest's tower at Ravenshoe.

Chapter XVIII

Charles meets Hornby at Last

OH for the whispering woodlands of Devna! Oh for the quiet summer evenings above the lakes, looking far away at the white-walled town on the distant shore! No more hare-shooting, no more turtle-catching, for you, my dear Charles. The allies had determined to take Sebastopol, and winter in the town. It was a very dull place, every one said; but there was a race-course, and there would be splendid boat-racing in the harbour. The country about the town was reported to be romantic, and there would be pleasant excursions in the winter to Simphropol, a gayer town than Sebastopol, and where there was more society. They were not going to move till the spring, when they were to advance up the valley of the Dnieper to Moscow, while a flying column was to be sent to follow the course of the Don, cross to the Volga at Suratow, and so penetrate into the Ural Mountains and seize the gold mines, or do something of this sort; it was all laid out quite plain.

Now, don't call this *ex post facto* wisdom, but just try to remember what extravagant ideas every non-military man had that autumn about what our army would do. The ministers of the King of Lernè never laid down a more glorious campaign than we did. "I will," says poor Picrochole, "give him fair quarter, and spare his life — I will rebuild Solomon's Temple — I will give you Caramania, Syria, and all Palestine." "Ha! sire," said

Charles meets Hornby at Last

they, "it is out of your goodness. Grammercy, we thank you." We have had our little lesson about that kind of amusement. There has been none of it in this American business; but our good friends the other side of the Atlantic are worse than they were in the time of the Pogrom defiance. Either they don't file their newspapers, or else they console themselves by saying that they could have done it all if they had liked.

It now becomes my duty to use all the resources of my art to describe Charles's emotions at the first sight of Sebastopol. Such an opportunity for the display of beautiful language should not be let slip. I could do it capitally by buying a copy of Mr. Russell's "War," or even by using the correspondence I have on the table before me. But I think you will agree with me that it is better left alone. One hardly likes to come into the field in that line after Russell.

Balaclava was not such a pleasant place as Devna. It was bare and rocky, and everything was in confusion, and the men were dying in heaps of cholera. The nights were beginning to grow chill, too, and Charles began to dream regularly, that he was sleeping on the bare hill-side, in a sharp frost, and that he was agonisingly cold about the small of his back. And the most singular thing was, that he always woke and found his dream come true. At first he only used to dream this dream towards morning; but, as October began to creep on, he used to wake with it several times in the night, and at last hardly used to go to sleep at all for fear of dreaming it.

Were there no other dreams? No. No dreams, but one ever-present reality. A dull aching regret for a past for ever gone. A heavy deadly grief, lost for a time among the woods of Devna, but come back to him now amidst the cold, and the squalor, and the sickness of Balaclava. A brooding over missed opportunities, and the things that might have been. Sometimes a tangled puzzled train of thought, as to how much of this ghastly misery was his

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own fault, and how much accident. And above all, a growing desire for death, unknown before.

And all this time, behind the hill, the great guns, which had begun a fitful muttering when they first came there, often dying off into silence ; now day by day, as trench after trench was opened, grew louder and more continuous, till hearing and thought were deadened, and the soul was sick of their never-ceasing melancholy thunder.

And at six o'clock on the morning of the seventeenth, such an infernal din began as no man there had ever heard before, which grew louder and louder till nine, when it seemed impossible that the ear could bear the accumulation of sound : and then suddenly doubled, as the *Agamemnon* and the *Montebello*, followed by the fleets, steamed in, and laid broadside-to under the forts. Four thousand pieces of the heaviest ordnance in the world were doing their work over that hill, and the 140th stood dismounted and listened.

At ten o'clock the earth shook, and a column of smoke towered up in the air above the hill, and as it began to hang motionless, the sound of it reached them. It was different from the noise of guns. It was something new and terrible. An angry hissing roar. An hour after they heard that twenty tons of powder were blown up in the French lines.

Soon after this, though, there was work to be done, and plenty of it. The wounded were being carried to the rear. Some cavalry were dismounted and told off for the work. Charles was one of them.

The wind had not yet sprung up, and all that Charles saw for the moment was a valley full of smoke, and fire, and sound. He caught a glimpse of the spars and funnel of a great liner above the smoke to the left ; but directly after they were under fire, and the sickening day's work began.

Death and horror in every form, of course. The wounded lying about in heaps. Officers trying to com-

Charles meets Hornby at Last

pose their faces, and die like gentlemen. Old Indian soldiers dying grimly as they had lived ; and lads, fresh from the plough last year, listed at the market-cross some unlucky Saturday, sitting up staring before them with a look of terror and wonder : sadder sight than either. But everywhere all the day, where the shot screamed loudest, where the shell fell thickest, with his shako gone, with his ambrosial curls tangled with blood, with his splendid gaudy fripperies soiled with dust and sweat, was Hornby, the dandy, the fop, the dicer ; doing the work of ten, carrying out the wounded in his arms, encouraging the dying, cheering on the living.

" I knew there was some stuff in him," said Charles, as he followed him into the Crown battery ; just at that time the worst place of all, for *The Twelve Apostles* had begun dropping red-hot shot into it, and exploded some ammunition, and killed some men. And they had met a naval officer, known to Hornby, wounded, staggering to the rear, who said, " that his brother was knocked over, and that they wanted to make out that he was dead, but he had only fainted." So they went back with him. The officer's brother was dead enough, poor fellow ; but as Charles and Hornby bent suddenly over him to look at him, their faces actually touched.

Hornby did not recognise him. He was in a state of excitement, and was thinking of no one less than Charles, and Charles's moustaches had altered him, as I said before. If their eyes had met, I believe Hornby would have known him ; but it was not to be till the 25th, and this was only the 17th. If Hornby could only have known him, if they could only have had ten minutes' talk together, Charles would have known all that we know about the previous marriage of his grandfather : and, if that conversation had taken place, he would have known more than any of them, for Hornby knew something which he thought of no importance, which was very important indeed. He knew where Ellen was.

Ravenshoe

But Charles turned his face away, and the recognition did not take place. Poor Charles said afterwards, that it was all a piece of luck — that “the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.” It is not the case. He turned away his eyes, and avoided the recognition. What he meant is this : —

As Hornby’s face was touching his, and they were both bending over the dead man, whom they could hardly believe to be dead, the men behind them fired off the great Lancaster in the next one-gun battery. “Crack !” and they heard the shell go piff, piff, piff, piff, and strike something. And then one man close to them cried out, “God Almighty !” and another cried “Christ !” as sailors will at such awful times ; and they both leapt to their feet. Above the smoke there hung, a hundred of feet in the air, a something like a vast black pine tree ; and, before they had time to realize what had happened, there was a horrible roar, and a concussion which made them stagger on their legs. A shell from the Lancaster had blown up the great redoubt in front of the Redan wall, and every Russian gun ceased firing. And above the sound of the Allied guns rose the cheering of our own men, sounding amidst the awful bass, like the shrill treble of school-children at play.

Charles said afterwards that this glorious accident prevented their recognition. It is not true. He prevented it himself, and took the consequences. But Hornby recognised him on the twenty-fifth in this wise : —

The first thing in the morning, they saw, on the hills to the right, Russian skirmishers creeping about towards them, apparently without an object. They had breakfast, and took no notice of them till about eight o’clock, when a great body of cavalry came slowly, regiment by regiment, from behind a hill near the Turks. Then gleaming batteries of artillery ; and, lastly, an endless column of grey infantry, which began to wheel into line. And when Charles had seen some five or six grey battalions come

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swinging out, the word was given to mount, and he saw no more, but contemplated the tails of horses. And at the same moment the guns began an irregular fire on their right.

Almost immediately the word was given to advance, which they did slowly. Charles could see Hornby just before him, in his old place, for they were in column. They crossed the plain, and went up the crest of the hill, halting on the high road. Here they sat for some time, and the more fortunate could see the battle raging below to the right. The English seemed getting rather the worst of it.

They sat there about an hour and a half ; and all in a moment, before any one seemed to expect it, some guns opened on them from the right ; so close that it made their right ears tingle. A horse from the squadron in front of Charles bolted from the ranks, and nearly knocked down Hornby. The horse had need to bolt, for he carried a dead man, who in the last spasm had pulled him on his haunches, and struck his spurs deep into his sides.

Charles began to guess that they were " in for it " at last. He had no idea, of course, whether it was a great battle or a little one ; but he saw that the 140th had work before them. I, of course, have only to speak of what Charles saw with his own eyes, and what therefore bears upon the story I am telling you. That was the only man he saw killed at that time, though the whole brigade suffered rather heavily by the Russian cannonade at that spot.

Very shortly after this they were told to form line. Of course, when this manœuvre was accomplished, Charles had lost sight of Hornby. He was sorry for this. He would have liked to know where he was ; to help him, if possible, should anything happen to him ; but there was not much time to think of it, for directly after they moved forward at a canter. In the front line were the 11th Hus-sars and the 13th Light Dragoons, and in the second were

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the 140th Hussars,* the 8th Hussars, and the 4th Dragoons. Charles could see thus much, now they were in line.

They went down hill, straight towards the guns, and almost at once the shot from them began to tell. The men of the 11th and 13th began to fall terribly fast. The men in the second line, in which Charles was, were falling nearly as fast, but this he could not remark. He missed the man next him on the right, one of his favourite comrades, but it did not strike him that the poor fellow was cut in two by a shot. He kept on wishing that he could see Hornby. He judged that the affair was getting serious. He little knew what was to come.

He had his wish of seeing Hornby, for they were riding up hill into a narrowing valley, and it was impossible to keep line. They formed into column again, though men and horses were rolling over and over at every stride, and there was Hornby before him, sailing along as gallant and gay as ever. A fine beacon to lead a man to a glorious death.

And, almost the next moment, the batteries right and left opened on them. Those who were there engaged can give us very little idea of what followed in the next quarter of an hour. They were soon among guns — the very guns that had annoyed them from the first; and infantry beyond opened fire on them. There seems to have been a degree of confusion at this point. Charles, and two or three others known to him, were hunting some Russian Artillerymen round their guns, for a minute or so. Hornby was among them. He saw also at this time his little friend the cornet, on foot, and rode to his assistance. He caught a riderless horse, and the cornet mounted. Then the word was given to get back again; I know not how; I have nothing to do with it. But, as they turned their faces to

* If one has to raise an imaginary regiment, one must put it in *an imaginary place*. The 17th Dragoons must try to forgive me.

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get out of this horrible hell, poor Charles gave a short, sharp scream, and bent down in his saddle over his horse's neck.

It was nothing. It was only as if one were to have twenty teeth pulled out at once. The pain was over in an instant. What a fool he was to cry out! The pain was gone again, and they were still under fire, and Hornby was before him.

How long? How many minutes, how many hours? His left arm was nearly dead, but he could hold his reins in a way, and rode hard after Hornby, from some wild instinct. The pain had stopped, but was coming on again as if ten thousand red-hot devils were pulling at his flesh, and twenty thousand were arriving each moment to help them.

His own friends were beside him again, and there was a rally and a charge. At what? he thought for an instant. At guns? No. At men this time, Russian hus-sars — right valiant fellows, too. He saw Hornby in the thick of the *mêlée*, with his sword flickering about his head like lightning. He could do but little himself; he rode at a Russian and unhorsed him; he remembers seeing the man go down, though whether he struck at him, or whether he went down by the mere superior weight of his horse, he cannot say. This I can say, though, that whatever he did, he did his duty as a valiant gentleman; I will go bail for that much.

They beat them back, and then turned. Then they turned again and beat them back once more. And then they turned and rode. For it was time. Charles lost sight of Hornby till the last, when some one caught his rein and turned his horse, and then he saw that they were getting into order again, and that Hornby was before him, reeling in his saddle.

As the noise of the battle grew fainter behind them, he looked round to see who was riding beside him, and holding him by the right arm. It was the little cornet.

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Charles wondered why he did so. "You're hard hit, Simpson," said the cornet. "Never mind. Keep your saddle a little longer. We shall be all right directly."

His faculties were perfectly acute, and, having thanked the cornet, he looked down and noticed that he was riding between him and a trooper, that his left arm was hanging numbed by his side, and that the trooper was guiding his horse. He saw that they had saved him, and even in his deadly agony he was so far his own old courteous self, that he turned right and left to them, and thanked them for what they had done for him.

But he had kept his eyes fixed on Hornby, for he saw that he was desperately hit, and he wanted to say one or two words to him before either of them died. Soon they were among English faces, and English cheers rang out in welcome to their return, but it was nothing to him; he kept his eye, which was growing dim, on Hornby, and, when he saw him fall off his saddle into the arms of a trooper, he dismounted too and staggered towards him.

The world seemed to go round and round, and he felt about him like a blind man. But he found Hornby somehow. A doctor, all scarlet and gold, was bending over him, and Charles knelt down on the other side and looked into the dying man's face.

"Do you know me, lieutenant?" he said, speaking thick like a drunken man, but determined to hold out; "you know your old servant, don't you?"

Hornby smiled as he recognised him, and said, "Ravenshoe." But then his face grew anxious, and he said, "Why did you hide yourself from me? You have ruined everything."

He could get no further for a minute, and then he said —

"Take this from round my neck and carry it to her. Tell her that you saw me die, and that I was true to our compact. Tell her that my share of our purification was complete, for I followed duty to death, as I promised her.

Charles meets Hornby at Last

She has a long life of weary penance before her to fulfil our bargain. Say I should wish her to be happy, only that I know she cannot be. And also say that I see now, that there is something better and more desirable than what we call happiness. I don't know what it is, but I suspect it is what we call duty."

Here the doctor said, "They are at it again, and I must go with them. I can do no good here for the poor dear fellow. Take what he tells you off his neck, in my presence, and let me go."

The doctor did it himself. When the great heavy gold stock was unbuttoned, Hornby seemed to breathe more freely. The doctor found round his neck a gold chain, from which hung a photograph of Ellen, and a black cross. He gave them to Charles, and departed.

Once more Charles spoke to Hornby. He said, "Where shall I find her?"

Hornby said, "Why, at Hackney, to be sure; did you not know she was there?" And afterwards, at the very last, "Ravenshoe, I should have loved you; you are like her, my boy. Don't forget."

But Charles never heard that. They found Hornby dead and cold, with his head on Charles's lap, and Charles looked so like him that they said, "This man is dead too; let us bury him." But a skilful doctor there present, said, "This man is not dead, and will not die;" and he was right.

Oh, but the sabres bit deep that autumn afternoon! There were women in Minsk, in Mogilef, in Tchernigof, in Jitemir, in Polimva, whose husbands were Hussars — and women in Taganrog, in Tcherkask, in Sanephta, which lies under the pleasant slate mountains, whose husbands and sons were Cossacks — who were made widows that day. For that day's work there was weeping in the reed-thatched hovels of the Don, and in the mud-built shanties of the Dnieper. For the 17th Lancers, the Scots Greys, the 1st Royals, and the 6th Enniskillens, — "these terrible

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beef-fed islanders " (to use the words of the *Northern Bee*) — were upon them; and Volhynia and Hampshire, Renfrewshire and Grodno, Podolia and Fermanagh, were mixed together in one common ruin.

Still, they say, the Princess Petrovitch, on certain days, leaves her carriage, and walks a mile through the snow barefoot, into Alexandroski, in memory of her light-haired handsome young son, whom Hornby slew at Balaclava. And I myself know the place where Lady Allerton makes her pilgrimage for those two merry boys of hers who lie out on the Crimean hill. Alas! not side by side. Up and down in all weathers, along a certain gravel walk, where the chalk brook, having flooded the park with its dammed-up waters, comes foaming and spouting over a cascade, and hurries past between the smooth-mown lawns of the pleasance. In the very place where she stood when the second letter came. And there, they say, she will walk at times, until her beauty and her strength are gone, and her limbs refuse to carry her.

Karlin Karlinoff was herding strange-looking goats on the Suratow hill-side, which looks towards the melancholy Volga on one side, and the reedy Ural on the other, when the Pulk came back, and her son was not with them. Eliza Jones had got on her husband's smock frock, and was a-setting of beans, when the rector's wife came struggling over the heavy lands and water-furrows, and broke the news gently, and with many tears. Karlin Karlinoff drove her goats into the mud-walled yard that night; though the bittern in the melancholy fen may have been startled from his reeds by a cry more wild and doleful than his own; and Eliza Jones went on setting her beans, though they were watered with her tears.

What a strange wild business it was! The extreme east of Europe against the extreme west. Men without a word, an idea, a habit or a hope in common, thrown suddenly together, to fight and slay; and then to part, having *learnt* to respect one another better, in one year of war,

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than ever they had, in a hundred years of peace. Since that year we have understood Eylau and Borodino, which battles were a puzzle to some of us before that time. The French did better than we, which was provoking, because the curs began to bark — Spanish curs, for instance ; American curs ; the lower sort of French cur ; and the Irish curs, who have the strange habit of barking the louder the more they are laughed at, and who, now, being represented by about two hundred men among six million, have rather a hard time of it. They barked louder, of course, at the Indian mutiny. But they have all got their tails between their legs now, and are likely to keep them there. We have had our lesson. We have learnt that what our fathers told us was true — that we are the most powerful nation on the face of the earth.

This, you will see, bears all upon the story I am telling you. Well, in a sort of way. Though I do not exactly see how. I could find a reason, if you gave me time. If you gave me time, I could find a reason for anything. However, the result is this, that our poor Charles had been struck by a ball in the bone of his arm, and that the splinters were driven into the flesh, though the arm was not broken. It was a nasty business, said the doctors. All sorts of things might happen to him. Only one thing was certain, and that was that Charles Ravenshoe's career in the army was over for ever.

Chapter XIX

Archer's Proposal

SIX weeks had passed since the date of Captain Archer's letter before he presented himself in person at Casterton. They were weary weeks enough to Mary, Lord Saltire, and Lady Ascot. Lady Ascot was staying on at Casterton, as if permanently, at the earnest request of Lord and

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Lady Hainault ; and she stayed on the more willingly that she and Mary might mingle their tears about Charles Ravenshoe, whom they were never to see again. The "previous marriage affair" had apparently fallen through utterly. All the advertisements, were they worded never so frantically, failed to raise to the surface the particular parish-clerk required ; and Lady Ascot, after having propounded a grand scheme for personally inspecting every register in the United Kingdom, which was pooh-poohed by Lord Saltire, now gave up the matter as a bad job ; and Lord Saltire himself began to be puzzled and uneasy, and once more to wonder whether or no Maria was not mistaken after all. Mackworth was still very ill, though slowly recovering. The younger Tiernay, who was nursing him, reported that his head seemed entirely gone, although he began to eat voraciously, and, if encouraged, would take exercise. He would now walk far and fast, in silence, with the kind priest toiling after him. But his wilful feet always led him to the same spot. Whether they rambled in the park, whether they climbed the granite tors of the moor, or whether they followed the stream up through the woods, they always ended their walk at the same place — at the pool among the tumbled boulders, under the dark western headland, where Cuthbert's body had been found. And here the priest would sit looking seaward, as if his life and his intellect had come to a full stop here, and he was waiting patiently till a gleam of light should come from beyond.

William was at Ravenshoe, in full possession of the property. He had been born a gamekeeper's son, and brought up as a groom. He had now 10,000*l.* a year ; and was going to marry the fisherman's daughter, his own true love ; as beautiful, as sweet-tempered a girl as any in the three kingdoms. It was one of the most extraordinary rises in life that had ever taken place. Youth, health, and wealth — they must produce happiness. Why no, not exactly in this case. He believed Charles was

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dead, and he knew, if that was the case, that the property was his ; but he was not happy. He could not help thinking about Charles. He knew he was dead and buried, of course ; but still he could not help wishing that he would come back, and that things might be again as they had been before. It is not very easy to analyse the processes of the mind of a man brought up as William was. Let us suppose that, having been taught to love and admire Charles above all earthly persons, his mind was not strong enough to disabuse himself of the illusion. I suppose that your African gets fond of his fetish. I take it that, if you stole his miserable old wooden idol in the night, though it might be badly carved, and split all up the back by the sun, and put in its place an Old Chelsea shepherdess, he would lament his graven image, and probably break the fifty guineas' worth of china with his club. I know this, however, that William would have given up his ten thousand a year, and have trusted to his brother's generosity, if he could have seen him back again. In barbarous, out-of-the-way places, like the west of Devonshire, the feudal feeling between foster-brothers is still absurdly strong. It is very ridiculous, of course. Nothing can be more ridiculous or unnecessary than the lightning coming down the dining-room chimney and sending the fire-irons flying about the cat's ears. But there it is, and you must make the best of it.

We are now posted up well enough in the six weeks which preceded the arrival of this mysterious Archer. He deferred his arrival till his honeymoon was completed. His mysterious letter to Mary partly alluded to his approaching marriage with Jane Blockstrop — daughter of Lieutenant Blockstrop of the coast guard, and niece of Rear-Admiral Blockstrop, who, as Captain Blockstrop, had the *Tartar* on the Australian station — and partly to something else. We shall see what directly. For, when Mary came down to see him in the drawing-room, there was with him, besides his wife, whom he introduced at

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once, a very tall and handsome young man, whom he presented to her as her cousin, George Corby.

Did Charles turn in his pallet at Scutari? Did he turn over and stare at the man in the next bed, who lay so deadly still, and who was gone when he woke on the weary morrow?

There was no mystery about George Corby's appearance. When Mary's father, Captain Corby, had gone to India, his younger brother, George's father, had gone to Australia. This younger brother was a somewhat peevish, selfish man, and was not on the best of terms with Captain Corby. He heard, of course, of the wreck of the *Warren Hastings*, and the loss of his brother. He also informed himself that his niece was saved, and was the protected favourite of the Ravenshoses. He had then said to himself, "I am needy. I have a rising family. She is better off than I can make her. Let her stay there." And so let her stay there, keeping himself, however, to do him justice, pretty well informed of her position. He had made the acquaintance of Captain Archer, at Melbourne, on his first voyage to that port, in the end of 1852; laid the whole matter before him, and begged him not to break it to her at present. Captain Archer had readily promised to say nothing, for he saw Mary the lady of a great house, with every prospect, as he thought, of marrying the heir. But when he saw Mary, after the break-up, in Grosvenor Square, a nursery governess, he felt that he ought to speak, and set sail from the port of London with a full determination of giving a piece of his mind to her uncle, should he hesitate to acknowledge her. He had no need to say much. Mr. Corby, though a selfish, was not an unkind man, by any means. And, besides, he was now very wealthy, and perfectly able to provide for his niece. So, when Archer had finished his story, he merely said, "I suppose I had better send over George to see if he will fall in love with her. That will be the best thing, I take it. She must not be a governess to those swells. They

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might slight or insult her. Take George over for me, will you, my dear soul, and see how it is likely to go. At all events, bring her back to me. Possibly I may not have done my duty by her."

George was called in from the rocking-chair in the verandah to receive instructions. He was, so his father told him, to go to Europe with Captain Archer, and, as Captain Archer was going to get married and miss a voyage, he might stay till he came back. First and foremost, he was to avail himself of his letters of introduction, and get into the good society that his father was able to command for him. Under this head of instruction he was to dance as much as possible, and to ride to the fox-hounds, taking care not to get too near to the hounds, or to rush at his fences like a madman, as all Australians did. Secondly, he was, if possible, to fall in love with his cousin Mary Corby, marry her, bring her back, and reside *pro tem.* at Toorallooraly - ballycoomefoozleah, which station should be swept and garnished for his reception, until the new house at the Juggerugahugjug crossing-place was finished. Thirdly, he might run across to the Saxony ram sales, and, if he saw anything reasonable, buy, but be careful of pink ears, for they wouldn't stand the Grampian frosts. Fourthly, he was not to smoke without changing his coat, or to eat the sugar when any one was looking. Fifthly, he was to look out for a stud horse, and might go as far as five hundred. Such a horse as Allow Me, Ask Mamma, or Pam's Mixture would do.* And so on, like the directions of the

* These names actually occur, side by side, in my newspaper (*The Field*) to which I referred for three names. They are in training by Henry Hall, at Hambleton, in Yorkshire. Surely men could find better names for their horses than such senseless ones as these. I would that was all one had to complain of. I hope the noble old sport is not on its last legs. But one trembles to think what will become of it, when the comparatively few high-minded men who are keeping things straight are gone.

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Aulic Council to the Archduke. He was not to go expressly to Durham ; but, if he found himself in that part of the world, he might get a short-horned bull. He need not go to Scotland unless he liked ; but, if he did, he might buy a couple of collies, &c. &c.

George attended the ram sales in Saxony, and just ran on to Vienna, thinking, with the philosophy of an Australian, that, if he *did* fall in love with his cousin, he might not care to travel far from her, and that therefore she might "keep." However, he came at last, when Archer had finished his honeymoon ; and there he was in the drawing-room at Casterton.

Mary was not very much surprised when it was all put before her. She had said to Charles, in old times, "I know I have relations somewhere ; when I am rich they will acknowledge me ;" and, just for one instant, the suspicion crossed her mind that her relations might have heard of the fortune Lord Saltire had left her. It was unjust and impossible, and in an instant she felt it to be so. Possibly the consciousness of her injustice made her reception of her cousin somewhat warmer.

He was certainly very handsome and very charming. He had been brought up by his father the most punctilious dandy in the southern hemisphere, and thrown from a boy among the best society in the colony ; so he was quite able to make himself at home everywhere. If there was a fault in his manner, it was that there was just a shade too much lazy ease in the presence of ladies. One has seen that lately, however, in other young gentlemen, not educated in the bush, to a greater extent ; so we must not be hard upon him. When Lady Hainault and Lady Ascot heard that a cousin of Mary's had just turned up from the wilds of Australia, they looked at one another in astonishment, and agreed that he must be a wild man. But, when they had gone down and sat on him, as a committee of two, for an hour, they both pronounced him charming. And so he was.

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Lord Hainault, on receiving this report, could do no less than ask him to stay a day or two. And so his luggage was sent for to Twyford, and the good Archer left, leaving him in possession.

Lord Saltire had been travelling round to all his estates. He had taken it into his head, about a month before this, that it was time that he should get into one of his great houses, and die there. He told Lady Ascot so, and advised her to come with him ; but she still held on by Lord Charles Herries' children and Mary, and said she would wait. So he had gone away, with no one but his confidential servant. He had gone to Cottingdean first, which stands on the bank of the Wannet, at the foot of the North Hampshire mountains.

Well, Cottingdean did seem at first sight a noble lair for an old lion to crawl away to, and die in. There was a great mile-long elm avenue, carried, utterly regardless of economy, over the flat valley, across the innumerable branches of the river ; and at the last the trees ran up over the first great heave of the chalk hill : and above the topmost boughs of those which stood in the valley, above the highest spire of the tallest poplar in the water-meadow, the old grey house hung aloft, a long irregular façade of stone. Behind were dark woods, and above all a pearl-green line of down.

But Cottingdean wouldn't do. His lordship's man Simpson knew it wouldn't do from the first. There were draughts in Cottingdean, and doors that slammed in the night, and the armour in the great gallery used suddenly to go "clank" at all hours, in a terrible way. And the lady ancestress of the seventeenth century, who carried her head in a plate before her, used to stump upstairs and downstairs, from twelve o'clock to one, when she was punctually relieved from duty by the wicked old ancestor of the sixteenth century, who opened the cellar door and came rattling his sword against the banisters up all the stair-case till he got to the north-east tower, into which he

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went and slammed the door ; and, when he had transacted his business, came clanking down again : when he in turn was relieved by an *οἱ πολλοὶ* of ghosts, who walked till cockcrow. Simpson couldn't stand it. No more could Lord Saltire, though possibly for different reasons than Simpson's.

The first night at Cottingdean Lord Saltire had his writing-desk unpacked, and took therefrom a rusty key. He said to Simpson, "You know where I am going. If I am not back in half an hour, come after me." Simpson knew where he was going. Lord Barkham had been staying here at Cottingdean just before he went up to town, and was killed in that unhappy duel. The old servants remembered that, when Lord Barkham went away that morning, he had taken the key of his room with him, and had said, in his merry way, that no one was to go in there till he came back the next week, for he had left all his love-letters about. Lord Saltire had got the key, and was going to open the room the first time for forty years.

What did the poor old man find there ? Probably nothing more than poor Barkham had said — some love-letters lying about. When the room was opened afterwards, by the new master of Cottingdean, we found only a boy's room, with fishing-rods and guns lying about. In one corner were a pair of muddy top-boots kicked off in a hurry, and an old groom remembered that Lord Barkham had been riding out the very morning he started for London. But, amidst the dust of forty years, we could plainly trace that some one had, comparatively recently, moved a chair up to the fire-place : and on the cold hearth there was a heap of the ashes of burnt paper.

Lord Saltire came back to Simpson just as his half-hour was over, and told him in confidence that the room he had been in was devilish draughty, and that he had caught cold in his ear. Cottingdean would not do after this. They departed next morning. They must try Marksworth.

Marksworth, Lord Saltire's north country place, is in

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Cumberland. If you are on the top of the coach, going northward, between Hiltonsbridge and Copley Beck, you can see it all the way for three miles or more, over the stone walls. The mountains are on your left ; to the right are endless unbroken level woodlands ; and, rising out of them, two miles off, is a great mass of gray building, from the centre of which rises a square Norman keep, ninety feet high, a beacon for miles even in that mountainous country. The Hilton and Copley Beck join in the park, which is twelve miles in circumference, and nearly all thick woodland. Beyond the great tower, between it and the further mountains, you catch a gleam of water. This is Marksmere, in which there are charr.

The draughts at Marksworth were colder and keener than the draughts at Cottingdean. Lord Saltire always hated the place ; for the truth is this, that although Marksworth looked as if it had stood for eight hundred years, every stone in it had been set up by his father, when he, Lord Saltire, was quite a big boy. It was beautifully done ; it was splendidly and solidly built — probably the best-executed humbug in England ; but it was not comfortable to live in. A nobleman of the nineteenth century, stricken in years, finds it difficult to accommodate himself in a house the windows of which are calculated to resist arrows. At the time of the Eglinton tournament, Lord Saltire challenged the whole Tory world in arms, to attack Marksworth in the ante-gunpowder style of warfare ; his Lordship to provide eatables and liquor to besiegers and besieged ; probably hoping that he might get it burnt down over his head, and have a decent excuse for rebuilding it in a more sensible style. The challenge was not accepted. “ The trouble,” said certain Tory noblemen, “ of getting up the old tactics correctly would be very great ; and the expense of having the old engines of war constructed would be enormous. Besides, it might come on to rain again, and spoil the whole affair.”

Marksworth wouldn't do. And then Simpson suggested

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his lordship's town house in Curzon Street, and Lord Saltire said "Hey?" and Simpson repeated his suggestion, and Lord Saltire said "Hah!" As Charles's luck would have it, he liked the suggestion, and turned south, coming to Casterton on his way to London. He arrived at Casterton a few days after George Corby. When he alighted at the door, Lord Hainault ran down the steps to greet him, for this pair were very fond of one another. Lord Hainault, who was accused by some people of "priggishness," was certainly not priggish before Lord Saltire. He was genial and hearty. There was a slight crust on Lord Hainault. Because he had held his own among the clever commoners at the university, he fancied himself a little cleverer than he was. He in his heart thought more of his second, than Marston did of his double first, and possibly showed it among his equals. But before an acknowledged superior, like Lord Saltire, this never showed. When Lord Saltire talked wisely and shrewdly (and who could do so better than he?), he listened; when Lord Saltire was cross, he laughed. On this occasion Lord Saltire was cross. He never was cross to any one but Lady Ascot, Lord Hainault, and Marston. He knew they liked it.

"Good Ged, Hainault," he began, "don't stand grinning there, and looking so abominably healthy and happy, or I will drive away again and go on to London. Nothing can be in worse taste than to look like that at a man whom you see is tired, and cold, and peevish. You have been out shooting, too. Don't deny it; you smell of gunpowder."

"Did you *never* shoot?" said Lord Hainault, laughing.

"I shot as long as I could walk, and therefore I have a right to nourish envy and all uncharitableness against those who can still do so. I wish you would be cross, Hainault. It is wretched manners not to be cross when you see a man is trying to put you out of temper."

"And how *are* you, my dear lad?" continued Lord

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Saltire, when he had got hold of his arm. "How is Lady Ascot? and whom have you got here?"

"We are all very well," said Lord Hainault; "and we have got nobody."

"Well done," said Lord Saltire. "I thought I should have found the house smelling like a poulterer's shop on Guy Fawkes's day, in consequence of your having got together all the hawbucks in the country for pheasant-shooting. I'll go upstairs, my dear boy, and change, and then come down to the library fire."

And so he did. There was no one there, and he sank into a comfortable chair with a contented "humph!" in front of the fire, beside a big round table. He had read the paper in the train; so he looked for a book. There was a book on the table beside him — Ruskin's "Modern Painters," which had pictures in it; so he took out his great gold glasses, and began turning it over.

A man's card fell from it. He picked it up and read it. "Mr. Charles Ravenshoe." Poor Charles! That spring, you remember, he had come over to see Adelaide, and, while waiting to see old Lady Hainault, had held his card in his hand. It had got into the book. Lord Saltire put the book away, put up his glasses, and walked to the window.

And Charles lay in his bed at Scutari and watched the flies upon the wall.

"I'll send up for little Mary," said Lord Saltire. "I want to see the little bird. Poor Charles!"

He looked out over the landscape. It was dull and foggy. He wandered into the conservatory, and idly looked out of the glass door at the end. Then, as he looked, he said, suddenly, "Gadzooks!" and then, still more briskly, "The deuce!"

There was a splendid show of chrysanthemums in the flower-garden, but they were not what his lordship exclaimed at. In the middle of the walk was Mary Corby, leaning on the arm of a very handsome young man. He

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was telling some very animated story, and she was looking up into his face with sparkling eyes.

"Othello and Desdemona! Death and confusion!" said Lord Saltire. "Here's a pretty kettle of fish! Maria must be mad!"

He went back into the library. Lord Hainault was there. "Hainault," said he, quietly, "who is that young gentleman, walking with Mary Corby in the garden?"

"Oh! her cousin. I have not had time to tell you about it." Which he did.

"And what sort of fellow is he?" said Lord Saltire. "A Yahoo, I suppose."

"Not at all. He is a capital fellow — a perfect gentleman. There will be a match, I believe, unless you put a stop to it. You know best. We will talk it over. It seems to me to offer a good many advantages. I think it will come off in time. It is best for the poor little thing to forget poor Ravenshoe, if she can."

"Yes, it will be best for her to forget poor Ravenshoe, if she can," repeated Lord Saltire. "I wish her to do so. I must make the young fellow's acquaintance. By-the-by, what time does your post go out?"

"At five."

"Have you no morning post?"

"Yes. We can send to Henley before nine."

"Then I shall not plague myself with writing my letter now. I should like to see this young fellow, Hainault."

George Corby was introduced. Lord Saltire seemed to take a great fancy to him. He kept near him all the evening, and listened with great pleasure to his Australian stories. George Corby was, of course, very much flattered by such attention from such a famous man. Possibly he might have preferred to be near Mary; but old men, he thought, are exacting, and it is the duty of gentlemen to bear with them. So he stayed by him with good grace. After a time, Lord Saltire seemed to see that he had an *intelligent* listener. And then the others were astonished

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to hear Lord Saltire do what he but seldom did for them — use his utmost powers of conversation ; use an art almost forgotten, that of *talking*. To this young man, who was clever and well educated, and, like most “squatters,” perhaps *a trifle* fond of hearing of great people, Lord Saltire opened the storehouse of his memory, of a memory extending over seventy years ; and in a clear, well modulated voice, gave him his recollection of his interviews with great people — conversations with Sièyes, Talleyrand, with Madame de Staël, with Robespierre, with Egalité, with Alexander, and a dozen others. George was intensely eager to hear about Marat. Lord Saltire and his snuff-box had not penetrated into the lair of that filthy wolf, but he had heard much of him from many friends, and told it well. When the ladies rose to go to bed, George Corby was astonished ; he had forgotten Mary, had never been near her the whole evening, and he had made an engagement to drive Lord Saltire the next morning up to Wargrave in a pony-chaise, to look at Barrymore House, and the place where the theatre stood, and where the game of high jinks had been played so bravely fifty years before. And, moreover, he and Lord Saltire were, the day after, to make an excursion down the river and see Medmenham, where once Jack Wilkes and the devil had held court. Mary would not see much of him at this rate for a day or two.

It was a great shame of this veteran to make such a fool of the innocent young bushman. There ought to be fair play in love or war. His acquaintance Talleyrand, could not have been more crafty. I am so angry with him that I will give the letter he wrote that night *in extenso*, and show the world what a wicked old man he was. When he went to his room, he said to Simpson, “I have got to write a letter before I go to bed. I want it to go to the post at Henley before nine. I don't want it to lie in the letter-box in the hall. I don't want them to see the direction, What an appetite you would have for your break-

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fast, Simpson, if you were to walk to Henley." And Simpson said, "Very good, my lord." And Lord Saltire wrote as follows : —

"MY DEAR LAD, — I have been travelling to my places, looking for a place to die in. They are all cold and draughty, and won't do. I have come back to Casterton. I must stay here at present on your account, and I am in mortal fear of dying here. Nothing, remember, can be more unmannerly or rude than falling ill, and dying, in another man's house. I know that I should resent such a proceeding myself as a deliberate affront, and I therefore would not do it for the world.

"You must come here to me *instantly*; do you hear? I am keeping the breach for you at all sacrifices. Until you come, I am to be trundled about this foggy valley in pony carriages through the day, and talk myself hoarse all the evening, all for your sake. A cousin of Mary Corby's has come from Australia. He is very handsome, clever, and gentlemanly, and I am afraid she is getting very fond of him.

"This must not be, my dear boy. Now our dear Charles is gone, you must, if possible, marry her. It is insufferable that we should have another disappointment from an interloper. I don't blame you for not having come before. You were quite right, but don't lose a moment now. Leave these boys of yours. The dirty little rogues must get on for a time without you. Don't think that I sneer at the noble work that you and your uncle are doing : God Almighty forbid ; but you must leave it for a time, and come here.

"Don't argue or procrastinate, but come. I cannot go on being driven all over the country in November to keep him out of the way. Besides, if you don't come soon, I shall have finished all my true stories, and have to do what I have never done yet — to lie. So make haste, my dear boy.

"Yours affectionately,

"SALTIRE,"

Archer's Proposal

On the second day from this Lord Saltire was driven to Medmenham by George Corby, and prophesied to him about it. When they neared home, Lord Saltire grew distraught for the first time, and looked eagerly towards the terrace. As they drove up, John Marston ran down the steps to meet them. Lord Saltire said, "Thank God!" and walked up to the hall-door between the two young men.

"Are you staying in London?" said George Corby.

"Yes. I am living in London," said John Marston. "An uncle of mine, a Moravian missionary from Australia, is working at a large ragged school in the Borough, and I am helping him."

"You don't surely mean James Smith?" said Corby.

"Indeed I do."

"Your uncle? Well, that is very strange. I know him very well. My father fought his battle for him when he was at variance with the squatters about He is one of the best fellows in the world. I am delighted to make your acquaintance."

Lord Saltire said to Lord Hainault, when they were alone together, — "You see what a liberty I have taken, having my private secretary down in this unceremonious way. Do ask him to stay."

"You know how welcome he is for his own sake. Do you think you are right?"

"I think so."

"I am afraid you are a little too late," said Lord Hainault.

Alas! poor Charles.

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Chapter XX

Scutari

ALAS! poor Charles. While they were all dividing the spoil at home, thinking him dead, where was he?

At Scutari. What happened to him before he got there, no one knows or ever will know. He does not remember, and there is no one else to tell. He was passed from hand to hand and put on board ship. Here fever set in, and he passed from a state of stupid agony into a state of delirium. He may have lain on the pier in the pouring rain, moistening his parched lips in the chilling shower; he may have been jolted from hospital to hospital, and laid in draughty passages, till a bed was found for him: as others were. But he happily knew nothing of it. Things were so bad with him now that it did not much matter how he was treated. Read Lord Sidney Osborne's "Scutari and its Hospitals," and see how he *might* have been, and probably was. It is no part of our duty to dig up and exhibit all that miserable mismanagement. I think we have learnt our lesson. I think I will go bail it don't happen again. Before Charles knew where he was, there was a great change for the better. The hospital nurses arrived early in November.

He thinks that there were faint gleams of consciousness in his delirium. In the first, he says he was lying on his back, and above him were the masts and spars of a ship, and a sailor-boy was sitting out on a yard in the clear blue, mending a rope or doing something. It may have been a dream or not. Afterwards there were periods, distinctly remembered, when he seemed conscious — conscious of pain, and space, and time — to a certain extent. At these times he began to understand, in a way, that he was dead, and in hell. The delirium was better than this at ordinary times, in spite of its headlong incon-

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gruities. It was not so unbearable, save at times, when there came the feeling, too horrible for human brain to bear, of being millions and millions of miles, or of centuries, away, with no road back; at such times there was nothing to be done but to leap out of bed, and cry aloud for help in God's name.

Then there came a time when he began, at intervals, to see a great vaulted arch overhead, and to wonder whether or no it was the roof of the pit. He began, after studying the matter many times, to find that pain had ceased, and that the great vaulted arch was real. And he heard low voices once at this time — blessed voices of his fellow-men. He was content to wait.

At last, his soul and consciousness seemed to return to him in a strange way. He seemed to pass out of some abnormal state into a natural one. For he became aware that he was alive; nay, more, that he was asleep, and dreaming a silly, pleasant dream, and that he could wake himself at any time. He awoke, expecting to awake in his old room at Ravenshoe. But he was not there, and looked round him in wonder.

The arch he remembered was overhead. That was real enough. Three people were round his bed — a doctor in undress, a gray-haired gentleman who peered into his face, and a lady.

"God bless me!" said the doctor. "We have fetched him through. Look at his eyes, just look at his eyes. As sane an eye as yours or mine, and the pulse as round as a button."

"Do you know us, my man?" said the gentleman.

It was possible enough that he did not, for he had never set eyes on him before. The gentleman meant only, "Are you sane enough to know your fellow-creatures when you see one?" Charles thought he must be some one he had met in society in old times and ought to recognise. He framed a polite reply, to the effect that he hoped he had been well since he met him last, and that,

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if he found himself in the west, he would not pass Ravenshoe without coming to see him.

The doctor laughed. "A little abroad, still, I daresay; I have pulled you through. You have had a narrow escape."

Charles was recovered enough to take his hand and thank him fervently, and whispered, "Would you tell me one thing, sir? How did Lady Hainault come here?"

"Lady Hainault, my man?"

"Yes, she was standing at the foot of the bed."

"That is no Lady Hainault, my man; that is Miss Nightingale. Do you ever say your prayers?"

"No."

"Say them to-night before you go to sleep, and remember her name in them. Possibly they may get to heaven the quicker for it. Good-night."

Prayers forgotten, eh! How much of all this misery lay in that, I wonder? How much of this dull, stupid, careless despair — earth a hopeless, sunless wilderness, and heaven not thought of? Read on.

But, while you read, remember that poor Charles had had no domestic religious education whatever. The vicar had taught him his catechism and "his prayers." After that, Shrewsbury and Oxford. Read on, but don't condemn; at least not yet.

That he thanked God with all the earnestness of his warm heart that night, and remembered that name the doctor told him, you may be sure. But, when the prayer was finished, he began to think whether or no it was sincere, whether it would not be better that he should die, and that it should be all over and done. His creed was, that, if he died in the faith of Christ, bearing no ill will to anyone, having repented of his sins, it would not go ill with him. Would it not be better to die now that he could fulfil those conditions, and not tempt the horrible black future? Certainly.

In time he left watching the great arch overhead, and

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the creeping shadows, and the patch of light on the wall, which shaped itself into a faint rhomboid at noon, and crept on till it defined itself into a perfect square at sundown, and then grew golden and died out. He began to notice other things. But till the last there was one effect of light and shadow which he always lay awake to see — a faint flickering on the walls and roof, which came slowly nearer, till a light was in his eyes. We all know what that was. It has been described twenty times. I can believe that story of the dying man kissing the shadow on the wall. When Miss Nightingale and her lamp are forgotten, it will be time to consider whether one would prefer to turn Turk or Mormon.

He began to take notice that there were men in the beds beside him. One, as we know, had been carried out dead; but there was another in his place now. And one day there was a great event; when Charles woke, both of them were up, sitting at the side of their beds, ghastly shadows, and talking across him.

The maddest musician never listened to the "vox humana" stop at Haarlem, with such delight as Charles did to these two voices. He lay for a time hearing them make acquaintance, and then he tried to sit up and join. He was on his left side, and tried to rise. His left arm would not support him, and he fell back, but they crept to him and set him up, and sat on his bed.

"Right again, eh, comrade?" said one. "I thought you was gone, my lad. But I heard the doctor say you'd get through. You look bravely. Time was when you used to jump out of bed, and cry on God A'mighty. Many a time I've strove to help ye. The man in *his* bed died while you was like that: a Fusilier Guards man. What regiment?"

"I am of the 140th," said Charles. "We had a bit of a brush with the enemy on the twenty-fifth. I was wounded there. It was a pretty little rattle, I think, for a time, but not of very much importance, I fancy."

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The man who had first spoken laughed ; the other man, a lad who had a round face once, perhaps, but which now was a pale death's head, with two great staring eyes, speaking with a voice which Charles knew at once to be a gentleman's, said, " Don't you know then that that charge of yours is the talk of Europe ? That charge will never be forgotten while the world is round. Six hundred men against ten battalions. Good God ! And you might have died there, and not known it."

" Ah, is it so ?" said Charles. " If some could only know it !"

" That is the worst of it," said the young man. " I have enlisted under a false name, and will never go home any more. Never more. And she will never know that I did my duty."

And after a time he got strong again in a way. A bullet, it appears, had struck the bone of his arm, and driven the splinters into the flesh. Fever had come on, and his splendid constitution, as yet untried, save by severe training, had pulled him through. But his left arm was useless. The doctor looked at it again and again, and shook his head.

The two men who were in the beds on each side of him were moved before him. They were only there a fortnight after his coming to himself. The oldest of the two went first, and two or three days after the younger.

The three made all sorts of plans for meeting in England. Alas, what chance is there for three soldiers to meet again, unless by accident ? At home it would have taken three years to have made these three men such hearty friends as they had become in a fortnight. Friendships are made in the camp, in the bush, or on board ship, at a wonderful rate. And, moreover, they last for an indefinite time. For ever, I fancy : for these reasons. Time does not destroy friendship. Time has nothing whatever to do with it. I have heard an old man of seventy-eight talking of a man he had not seen for twelve

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years, and before that for twenty-five, as if they were young men together. Craving for his company, as if once more they were together on the deck of the white-sailed yacht, flying before the easterly wind between Hurst-castle and Sconce Point. Mere continual familiarity, again, does not hurt friendship, unless interests clash. Diversity of interests is the death-blow of friendship. One great sacrifice may be made — two, or even three; but, after the first, two men are not to one another as they were before. Where men are thrown intimately together for a short time, and part have only seen the best side of one another, or where men see one another frequently, and have not very many causes of difference, friendship will flourish for ever. In the case of love it is very different, and for this obvious reason, which I will explain in a few pages if —

I entered into my own recognisances, in an early chapter of this story, not to preach. I fear they are escheated after this short essay on friendship, coming, as it does, exactly in the wrong place. I must only throw myself on the court, and purge myself of my contempt by promising amendment.

Poor Charles after a time was sent home to Fort Pitt. But that mighty left arm, which had done such noble work when it belonged to No. 3, in the Oxford University eight, was useless, and Charles Simpson, trooper in the 140th, was discharged from the army, and found himself on Christmas Eve in the street in front of the Waterloo Station, with eighteen shillings and ninepence in his pocket, wondering blindly what the end of it all would be, but no more dreaming of begging from those who had known him formerly than of leaping off Waterloo Bridge. Perhaps not half as much.

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Chapter XXI

What Charles did with his Last Eighteen Shillings

CHARLES' luck seemed certainly to have deserted him at last. And that is rather a serious matter, you see ; for, as he had never trusted to anything but luck, it now follows that he had nothing left to trust to, except eighteen shillings and ninepence, and his little friend the cornet, who had come home invalided, and was living with his mother in Hyde Park Gardens. Let us hope, reader, that you and I may never be reduced to the patronage of a cornet of Hussars, and eighteen shillings in cash.

It was a fine frosty night, and the streets were gay and merry. It was a sad Christmas for many thousands ; but the general crowd seemed determined not to think too deeply of these sad accounts which were coming from the Crimea just now. They seemed inclined to make Christmas Christmas, in spite of everything ; and perhaps they were right. It is good for a busy nation like the English to have two great festivals, and two only, the object of which every man who is a Christian can understand, and on these occasions to put in practice, to the best of one's power, the lesson of goodwill towards men which our Lord taught us. We English cannot stand too many saints' days. We decline to stop business for St. Blaize or St. Swithin ; but we can understand Christmas and Easter. The foreign Catholics fiddle away so much time on saints' days that they are obliged to work like the Israelites in bondage on Sunday to get on at all. I have as good a right to prophesy as any other freeborn Englishman who pays rates and taxes ; and I prophesy that, in this wonderful resurrection of Ireland, the attendance of the male population at Church on week-days will get small by degrees and beautifully less.

One man, Charles Ravenshoe, has got to spend his

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Christmas with eighteen shillings and a crippled left arm. There is half a million of money or so, and a sweet little wife, waiting for him if he would only behave like a rational being ; but he will not, and must take the consequences.

He went westward, through a kind of instinct, and he came to Belgrave Square, where a certain duke lived. There were lights in the windows. The duke was in office, and had been called up to town. Charles was glad of this ; not that he had any business to transact with the duke, but a letter to deliver to the duke's coachman.

This simple circumstance saved him from being much nearer actual destitution than I should have liked to see him. The coachman's son had been wounded at Balaclava, and was still at Scutari, and Charles brought a letter from him. He got an English welcome, I promise you. And, next morning, going to Hyde Park Gardens, he found that his friend the cornet was out of town, and would not be back for a week. At this time the coachman became very useful. He offered him money, house-room, employment, everything he could possibly get for him ; and Charles heartily and thankfully accepted house-room and board for a week.

At the end of a week he went back to Hyde Park Gardens. The cornet was come back. He had to sit in the kitchen while his message was taken upstairs. He merely sent up his name, said he was discharged, and asked for an interview.

The servants found out that he had been at the war in their young master's regiment, and they crowded round him full of sympathy and kindness. He was telling them how he had last seen the cornet in the thick of it on the terrible 25th, when they parted right and left, and in dashed the cornet himself, who caught him by both hands.

" By gad, I'm so glad to see you. How you are altered without your moustache ! Look you here, you fellows and girls, this is the man that charged up to my assistance

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when I was dismounted among the guns, and kept by me, while I caught another horse. What a cropper I went down, didn't I? What a terrible brush it was, eh? And poor Hornby, too! It is the talk of Europe, you know. You remember old Devna, and the galloping lizard, eh?"

And so on, till they got upstairs; and then he turned on him, and said, "Now, what are you going to do?"

"I have got eighteen shillings."

"Will your family do nothing for you?"

"Did Hornby tell you anything about me, my dear sir?" said Charles, eagerly.

"Not a word. I never knew that Hornby and you were acquainted till I saw you together when he was dying."

"Did you hear what we said to one another?"

"Not a word. The reason I spoke about your family is that no one, who had seen so much of you as I, could doubt that you were a gentleman. That is all. I am very much afraid I shall offend you —"

"That would not be easy, sir."

"Well, then, here goes. If you are utterly hard up, take service with me. There."

"I will do so with the deepest gratitude," said Charles.

"But I cannot ride, I fear. My left arm is gone."

"Pish! ride with your right. It's a bargain. Come up and see my mother. I must show you to her, you know, because you will have to live here. She is deaf. Now you know the reason why the major used to talk so loud."

Charles smiled for an instant; he did remember that circumstance about the cornet's respected and gallant father. He followed the cornet upstairs, and was shown into the drawing-room, where sat a very handsome lady, about fifty years of age, knitting.

She was not only stone deaf, but had a trick of talking aloud, like the old lady in "Pickwick," under the impression that she was only thinking, which was a very disconcerting habit indeed. When Charles and the cornet entered the room, she said aloud, with amazing distinctness,

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looking hard at Charles, "God bless me! Who has he got now? What a fine gentlemanly-looking fellow. I wonder why he is dressed so shabbily." After which she arranged her trumpet, and prepared to go into action.

"This, mother," bawled the cornet, "is the man who saved me in the charge at Balaclava."

"Do you mean that that is trooper Simpson?" said she.

"Yes, mother."

"Then may the blessing of God Almighty rest upon your head!" she said to Charles. "The time will come, trooper Simpson, when you will know the value of a mother's gratitude. And when that time comes think of me. But for you, trooper Simpson, I might have been tearing my grey hair this day. What are we to do for him, James? He looks ill and worn. Words are not worth much. What shall we do?"

The cornet put his mouth to his mother's trumpet, and in an apologetic bellow, such as one gets from the skipper of a fruit brig, in the Bay of Biscay, O! when he bears up to know if you will be so kind as to oblige him with the longitude; roared out:

"He wants to take service with me. Have you any objection?"

"Of course not, you foolish boy," said she. "I wish we could do more for him than that." And then she continued in a tone slightly lowered, but perfectly audible, evidently under the impression that she was thinking to herself: "He is ugly, but he has a sweet face. I feel certain he is a gentleman who has had a difference with his family. I wish I could hear his voice. God bless him! he looks like a valiant soldier. I hope he won't get drunk, or make love to the maids."

Charles had heard every word of this before he had time to bow himself out.

And so he accepted his new position with dull carelessness. Life was getting very worthless.

He walked across the park to see his friend, the coach-

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man. The frost had given, and there was a dull dripping thaw. He leant against the railings at the end of the Serpentine. There was still a great crowd all round the water ; but up the whole expanse there were only four skaters, for the ice was very dangerous and rotten, and the people had been warned off. One of the skaters came sweeping down to within a hundred yards of where he was — a reckless, headlong skater, one who would chance drowning to have his will. The ice cracked every moment and warned him, but he would not heed, till it broke, and down he went ; clutching wildly at the pitiless, up-tilted slabs which clanked about his head, to save himself ; and then with a wild cry disappeared. The icemen were on the spot in a minute ; and, when five were past, they had him out, and bore him off to the receiving-house. A gentleman, a doctor apparently, who stood by Charles, said to him, " Well, there is a reckless fool gone to his account, God forgive him ! "

" They will bring him round, won't they ? " said Charles.

" Ten to one against it," said the doctor. " What right has he to calculate on such a thing, either ? Why, most likely there will be half a dozen houses in mourning for that man to-morrow. He is evidently a man of some mark. I can pity his relations in their bereavement, sir, but I have precious little pity for a reckless fool."

And so Charles began to serve his friend, the cornet, in a way — a very poor way, I fear, for he was very weak and ill, and could do but little. The deaf lady treated him like a son, God bless her ; but Charles could not recover the shock of his fever and delirium in the Crimea. He grew very low-spirited and despondent by day, and, worst of all, he began to have sleepless nights — terrible nights. In the rough calculation he had made of being able to live through his degradation, and get used to it, he had calculated, unwittingly, on perfect health. He had thought that in a few years he should forget the old life, and be-

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come just like one of the grooms he had made his companions. This had now become impossible, for his health and his nerve were gone.

He began to get afraid of his horses ; that was the first symptom. He tried to fight against the conviction, but it forced itself upon him. When he was on horseback, he found that he was frightened when anything went wrong ; his knees gave way on emergency, and his hand was irresolute. And, what is more, be sure of this, that, before he confessed the fact to himself, the horses had found it out, and " taken action on it," or else, may I ride a donkey, with my face towards the tail, for the rest of my life.

And he began to see another thing. Now, when he was nervous, in ill health, and whimsical, the company of men among whom he was thrown as fellow-servants became nearly unbearable. Little trifling acts of coarseness, unnoticed when he was in good health and strong, at the time he was with poor Hornby, now disgusted him. Most kind-hearted young fellows, brought up as he had been, are apt to be familiar with and probably pet and spoil, the man whose duty it is to minister to their favourite pleasures, be he gamekeeper or groom, or cricketer, or waterman. Nothing can be more natural, or, in proper bounds, harmless. Charles had thought that, being used to these men, he could live with them and do as they did. For a month or two, while in rude coarse health, he found it was possible ; for had not Lord Welter and he done the same thing for amusement ? But now, with shattered nerves, he found it intolerable. I have had great opportunities of seeing gentlemen trying to do this sort of thing — I mean in Australia — and, as far as my experience goes, it ends in one of two ways. Either they give it up as a bad job, and assume the position that superior education gives them, or else they take to drink, and go, not to mince matters, to the devil.

What Charles did, we shall see. Nobody could be more kind and affectionate than the cornet and his deaf mother.

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They guessed that he was "somebody," and that things were wrong with him ; though, if he had been a chimney-sweep's son, it would have made no difference to them, for they were "good people." The cornet once or twice invited his confidence ; but he was too young, and Charles had not the energy to tell him anything. His mother, too, asked him to tell her if anything was wrong in his affairs, and whether she could help him ; and possibly he might have been more inclined to confide in her, than in her son. But who could bellow such a sad tale of misery through an ear-trumpet ? He held his peace.

He kept Ellen's picture, which he had taken from Hornby. He determined he would not go and seek her. She was safe somewhere, in some Catholic asylum. Why should he re-open her grief ?

But life was getting very, very weary business. By day, his old favourite pleasure of riding had become a terror, and at night he got no rest. Death forty good years away, by all calculation. A weary mite.

He thought himself humbled, but he was not. He said to himself that he was prevented from going back, because he had found out that Mary was in love with him, and also because he was disgraced through his sister ; and both of these reasons were, truly, most powerful with him. But, in addition to this, I fear there was a great deal of obstinate pride, which thing is harder to beat out of a man than most things.

And now, after all this half-moralizing narrative, an important fact or two. The duke was very busy, and stayed in town, and, as a consequence, the duke's coachman. Moreover, the duke's coachman's son came home invalided, and stayed with his father ; and Charles, with the hearty approval of the cornet, used to walk across the park every night to see him, and talk over the campaign, and then look in at the Servants' Club, of which he was still a member. And the door of the Servants' Club room had glass windows to it. And I have noticed that anybody who

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looks through a glass window (under favourable circumstances) can see who is on the other side. I have done it myself more than once.

Chapter XXII

The North Side of Grosvenor Square

JOHN MARSTON'S first disappointment in life had been his refusal by Mary. He was one of those men, brought up in a hard school, who get, somehow, the opinion, that everything which happens to a man is his own fault. He used to say that every man who could play whist could get a second if he chose. I have an idea that he is in some sort right. But he used to carry this sort of thing to a rather absurd extent. He was apt to be hard on men who failed, and to be always the first to say, "If he had done this, or left that alone, it would not have been so," and he himself, with a calm clear brain and perfect health, had succeeded in everything he had ever tried at, even up to a double first. At one point he was stopped. He had always given himself airs of superiority over Charles, and had given him advice, good as it was, in a way which would have ruined his influence with nine men out of ten; and suddenly he was brought up. At the most important point in life, he found Charles his superior. Charles had won a woman's love without knowing it, or caring for it; and he had tried for it, and failed.

John Marston was an eminently noble and high-minded man. His faults were only those of education, and his faults were very few. When he found himself rejected, and found out why it was so — when he found that he was no rival of Charles, and that Charles cared naught for poor Mary — he humbly set his quick brain to work to find out in what way Charles, so greatly his inferior in intellect, was superior to him in the most important of all

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things. For he saw that Charles had not only won Mary's love, but the love of every one who knew him: whereas he, John Marston, had but very few friends.

And, when he once set to work at this task, he seemed to come rapidly to the conclusion that Charles was superior to him in everything except application. "And how much application should I have had," he concluded, "if I had not been a needy man?"

So you see that his disappointment cured him of what was almost his only vice — conceit. Everything works together for good, for those who are really good.

Hitherto, John Marston had led only the life that so many young Englishmen lead — a life of study, combined with violent, objectless, physical exertion, as a counterpoise. He had never known what enthusiasm was as yet. There was a vast deal of it somewhere about him; in his elbows, or his toes, or the calves of his legs, or somewhere, as events prove. If I might hazard an opinion, I should say that it was stowed away somewhere in that immensely high, but somewhat narrow forehead of his. Before he tried love-making, he might have written the calmest and most exasperating article in the *Saturday Review*. But, shortly after that, the tinder got a-fire; and the man who set it on fire was his uncle Smith, the Moravian missionary.

For this fellow, Smith, had, as we know, come home from Australia with the dying words of his beautiful wife ringing in his ears: "Go home from here, my love, into the great towns, and see what is to be done there." And he had found his nephew, John Marston. And, while Marston listened to his strange wild conversation, a light broke in upon him. And what had been to him merely words before this, now became glorious, tremendous realities.

And so those two had gone hand in hand down into the dirt and the profligacy of Southwark, to do together a work the reward of which comes after death. There are

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thousands of men at such work now. We have no more to do with it than to record the fact, that these two were at it heart and hand.

John Marston's love for Mary had never waned for one instant. When he had found that, or thought he had found that, she loved Charles, he had in a quiet, dignified way, retired from the contest. He had determined that he would go away and work at ragged schools, and so on, and try to forget all about her. He had begun to fancy that his love was growing cool, when Lord Saltire's letter reached him, and set it all a-blaze again.

This was unendurable — that a savage, from the southern wilds, should step in like this, without notice. He posted off to Casterton.

Mary was very glad to see him ; but he had proposed to her once, and, therefore, how could she be so familiar with him as of yore ? Notwithstanding this, John was not so very much disappointed at his reception ; he had thought that matters were even worse than they were.

After dinner, in the drawing-room, he watched them together. George Corby was evidently in love. He went to Mary, who was sitting alone, the moment they came from the dining-room. Mary looked up, and caught his eyes as he approached ; but her eyes wandered from him to the door, until they settled on John himself. She seemed to wish that he would come and talk to her. He had a special reason for not doing so ; he wanted to watch her and George together. So he stayed behind, and talked to Lord Hainault.

Lord Saltire moved up beside Lady Ascot. Lady Hainault had the three children — Archy in her lap, and Gus and Flora beside her. In her high and mighty way, she was amusing them, or rather trying to do so. Lady Hainault was one of the best and noblest women in the world, as you have seen already ; but she was not an amusing person. And no one knew it better than herself. Her intentions were excellent : she wanted to leave Mary free

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from the children until their bed-time, so that she might talk to her old acquaintance, John Marston ; for, at the children's bed-time, Mary would have to go with them. Even Lady Hainault, determined as she was, never dared to contemplate putting those children to bed without Mary's assistance. She was trying to tell them a story out of her own head, but was making a dreadful mess of it ; and she was quite conscious that Gus and Flora were listening to her with contemptuous pity.

So they were disposed. Lord Saltire and Lady Ascot were comfortably out of hearing. We had better attend to them first, and come round to the others afterwards.

Lady Ascot began. "James," she said, "it is perfectly evident to me that you sent for John Marston."

"Well, and suppose I did ?" said Lord Saltire.

"Well, then, why did you do so ?"

"Maria," said Lord Saltire, "do you know that sometimes you are intolerably foolish ? Cannot you answer that question for yourself ?"

"Of course I can," said Lady Ascot.

"Then why the deuce did you ask me ?"

That was a hard question to answer, but Lady Ascot said :

"I doubt if you are wise, James. I believe it would be better that she should go to Australia. It is a very good match for her."

"It is not a good match for her," said Lord Saltire, testily. "To begin with, first cousin marriages are an invention of the devil. Third and lastly, she sha'n't go to that infernal hole. Sixthly, I want her, now our Charles is dead, to marry John Marston ; and, in conclusion, I mean to have my own way."

"Do you know," said Lady Ascot, "that he proposed to her before, and was rejected ?"

"He told me of it the same night," said Lord Saltire. "Now, don't talk any more nonsense, but tell me this, Is she bitten with that young fellow ?"

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"Not deeply, as yet, I think," said Lady Ascot.

"Which of them has the best chance?" said Lord Saltire.

"James," said Lady Ascot, repeating his own words, "do you know that sometimes you are intolerably foolish? How can I tell?"

"Which would you bet on, Miss Headstall?" asked Lord Saltire.

"Well! well!" said Lady Ascot, "I suppose I should bet on John Marston."

"And how long are you going to give Sebastopol, Lord Hainault?" said John Marston.

"What do you think about the Greek Kalends, my dear Marston?" said Lord Hainault.

"Why, no. I suppose we shall get it at last. It won't do to have it said that England and France —"

"Say France and England just now," said Lord Hainault.

"No, I will not. It must not be said that England and France could not take a Black Sea fortress."

"We shall have to say it, I fear," said Lord Hainault. "I am not quite sure that we English don't want a thrashing."

"I am sure we do," said Marston. "But we shall never get one. That is the worst of it."

"My dear Marston," said Lord Hainault, "you have a clear head. Will you tell me this? Do you believe that Charles Ravenshoe is dead?"

"God bless me, Lord Hainault, have you any doubts?"

"Yes."

"So have I," said Marston, turning eagerly towards him. "I thought you had all made up your minds. If there is any doubt, ought we not to mention it to Lord Saltire?"

"I think that he has doubts himself. I may tell you that he has secured to him, in case of his return, eighty thousand pounds."

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"He would have made him his heir, I suppose," said John Marston; "would he not?"

"Yes; I think I am justified in saying yes."

"And so all the estates go to Lord Ascot in any case?"

"Unless in case of Charles's reappearance before his death; in which case, I believe he would alter his will."

"Then, if Charles be alive, he had better keep out of Lord Ascot's way on dark nights, in narrow lanes," said John Marston.

"You are mistaken there," said Lord Hainault, thoughtfully. "Ascot is a bad fellow. I told him so once in public, at the risk of getting an awful thrashing. If it had not been for Mainwaring, I should have had sore bones for a twelvemonth. But — but — well, I was at Eton with Ascot, and Ascot was and is a great blackguard. But, do you know, he is to some a very affectionate fellow. You know he was adored at Eton."

"He was not liked at Oxford," said Marston. "I never knew any good of him. He is a great rascal."

"Yes," said Lord Hainault, "I suppose he is what you would call a great rascal. Yes; I told him so, you know. And I am not a fighting man, and that proves that I was strongly convinced of the fact, or I should have shirked my duty. A man in my position don't like to go down to the House of Lords with a black eye. But I doubt if he is capable of any deep villany yet. If you were to say to me that Charles would be unwise to allow Ascot's wife to make his gruel for him, I should say that I agreed with you."

"There you are certainly right, my lord," said John Marston, smiling. "But I never knew Lord Ascot spare either man or woman."

"That is very true," said Lord Hainault. "Do you notice that we have been speaking as if Charles Ravenshoe were not dead?"

"I don't believe he is," said John Marston.

"Nor I, do you know," said Lord Hainault; "at least

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only half. What a pair of ninnies we are. Only ninety men of the 140th came out of that Balaclava charge. If he escaped the cholera, the chances are in favour of his having been killed there."

"What evidence have we that he enlisted in that regiment at all?"

"Lady Hainault's and Mary's description of his uniform, which they never distinctly saw for one moment," said Lord Hainault. "*Voilà tout.*"

"And you would not speak to Lord Saltire?"

"Why, no. He sees all that we see. If he comes back, he gets eighty thousand pounds. It would not do either for you or me to press him to alter his will. Do you see?"

"I suppose you are right, Lord Hainault. Things cannot go very wrong either way. I hope Mary will not fall in love with that cousin of hers," he added, with a laugh.

"Are you wise in persevering, do you think?" said Lord Hainault, kindly.

"I will tell you in a couple of days," said John Marston. "Is there any chance of seeing that best of fellows, William Ravenshoe, here?"

"He may come tumbling up. He has put off his wedding in consequence of the death of his half-brother. I wonder if he was humbugged at Varna."

"Nothing more likely," said Marston. "Where is Lord Welter?"

"In Paris — plucking geese."

Just about this time all the various groups in the drawing-room seemed to come to the conclusion that a time had arrived for new combinations, to avoid remarks. So there was a regular puss-in-the-corner business. John Marston went over to Mary; George Corby came to Lord Hainault; Lord Saltire went to Lady Hainault, who had Archy asleep in her lap; and Gus and Flora went to Lady Ascot.

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"At last, old friend," said Mary to John Marston. "And I have been watching for you so long. I was afraid that the time would come for the children to go to bed, and that you would never come and speak to me."

"Lord Hainault and I were talking politics," said Marston. "That is why I did not come."

"Men must talk politics, I suppose," said Mary. "But I wish you had come while my cousin was here. He is so charming. You will like him."

"He seems to be a capital fellow," said Marston.

"Indeed he is," said Mary. "He is really the most loveable creature I have met for a long time. If you would take him up, and be kind to him, and show him life, from the side from which *you* see it, you would be doing a good work. And you would be obliging *me*. And I know, my dear friend, that you like to oblige me."

"Miss Corby, you know that I would die for you."

"I know it. Who better? It puzzles me to know what I have done to earn such kindness from you. But there it is. You will be kind to him."

Marston was partly pleased, and partly disappointed by this conversation. Would you like to guess why? Yes. Then I will leave you to do so, and save myself half a page of writing.

Only saying this, for the benefit of inexperienced novel-readers, that he was glad to hear her talk in that free and easy manner about her cousin; but would have been glad if she had not talked in that free and easy manner to himself. Nevertheless, there was evidently no harm done as yet. That was a great cause of congratulation; there was time yet.

Gus and Flora went over to Lady Ascot. Lady Ascot said, "My dears, is it not near bed-time?" just by way of opening the conversation — nothing more.

"Lawks a mercy me, no," said Flora. "Go along with you, do, you foolish thing."

"My dear! my dear!" said Lady Ascot.

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"She is imitating old Alwright," explained Gus. "She told me she was going to. Lord Saltire says, Maria! Maria! Maria! — you are intolerably foolish, Maria!"

"Don't be naughty, Gus," said Lady Ascot.

"Well, so he did, for I heard him. Don't mind us; we don't mean any harm. I say, Lady Ascot, has she any right to bite and scratch?"

"Who?" said Lady Ascot.

"Why, that Flora. She bit Alwright because she wouldn't lend her Mrs. Moko."

"Oh! you dreadful fib," said Flora. "Oh! you wicked boy, you know where you'll go to if you tell such stories. Lady Ascot, I didn't bite her; I only said she ought to be bit. She told me that she couldn't let me have Mrs. Moko, because she was trying caps on her. And then she told nurse that I should never have her again, because I squeezed her flat. And so she told a story. And it was not I who squeezed her flat, but that boy, who is worse than Ananias and Sapphira. I made a boggy of her in the nursery door, with a broom and a counterpane, just as he was coming in. And he shut the door on her head and squeezed a piece of paint off her nose as big as half a crown."

Lady Ascot was relieved by being informed that the Mrs. Moko, aforesaid, was only a pasteboard image, the size of life, used by the lady's maid for fitting caps.

There were many evenings like this; a week or so was passed without any change. At last, there was a move towards London.

The first who took flight was George Corby. He was getting dissatisfied, in his sleepy semi-tropical way, with the state of affairs. It was evident that, since John Marston's arrival, he had been playing, with regard to Mary, second fiddle (if you can possibly be induced to pardon the extreme coarseness of the expression). One day, Lord Saltire asked him to take him for a drive. They went over to dismantled Ranford, and Lord Saltire was more

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amusing than ever. As they drove up through the dense larch plantation, on the outskirts of the park, they saw Marston and Mary side by side. George Corby bit his lip.

"I suppose there is something there, my lord?" said he.

"Oh dear, yes; I hope so," said Lord Saltire. "Oh, yes, that is a very old affair."

So George Corby went first. He did not give up all hopes of being successful, but he did not like the way things were going. His English expedition was not quite so pleasant as he intended it to be. He, poor fellow, was desperately in love, and his suit did not seem likely to prosper. He was inclined to be angry with Lord Saltire. He should not have let things go so far, thought George, without letting him know; quite forgetting that the mischief was done before Lord Saltire's arrival.

Lord Saltire and John Marston moved next. Lord Saltire had thought it best to take his man Simpson's advice, and move into his house in Curzon Street. He had asked John to come with him.

"It is a very nice little house," he said; "deuced well aired, and that sort of thing; but I know I shall have a creeping in my back when I go back for the first week, and fancy there is a draught. This will make me peevish. I don't like to be peevish to my servants, because it is unfair; they can't answer one. I wish you would come and let me be peevish to you. You may just as well. It will do you good. You have got a fancy for disciplining yourself, and all that sort of thing; and you will find me capital practice for a week or so, in a fresh house. After that I shall get amiable, and then you may go. You may have the use of my carriage, to go and attend to your poor man's plaster business in Southwark, if you like. I am not nervous about fever or vermin. Besides, it may amuse me to hear all about it. And you can bring that cracked uncle of yours to see me sometimes; his Scriptural talk is very piquant."

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Lord and Lady Hainault moved up into Grosvenor Square, too, for Parliament was going to meet rather early. They persuaded Lady Ascot to come and stay with them.

After a few days, William made his appearance. "Well, my dear Ravenshoe," said Lord Hainault, "and what brings you to town?"

"I don't know," said William. "I cannot stay down there. Lord Hainault, do you know that I think I am going cracked."

"Why, my dear fellow, what do you mean?"

"I have got such a strange fancy in my head, I cannot rest."

"What is your fancy?" said Lord Hainault. "Stay; may I make a guess at it?"

"You would never dream what it is. It is too mad."

"I will guess," said Lord Hainault. "Your fancy is this: — You believe that Charles Ravenshoe is alive, and you have come up to London to take your chance of finding him in the streets."

"But, good God!" said William, "how have you found this out? I have never told it even to my own sweetheart."

"Because," said Lord Hainault, laying his hand on his shoulder, "I and John Marston have exactly the same fancy. That is why."

And Charles so close to them all the time. Creeping every day across the park to see the coachman and his son. Every day getting more hopeless. All energy gone. Wit enough left to see that he was living on the charity of the cornet. There were some splinters in his arm which would not come away, and kept him restless. He never slept now. He hesitated when he was spoken to. Any sudden noise made him start and look wild. I will not go on with the symptoms. Things were much worse with him than we have ever seen them before. He, poor lad, began to wonder whether it would come to him to die in a hospital, or —

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Those cursed bridges! Why did they build such things? Who built them? The devil. To tempt ruined desperate men, with ten thousand fiends gnawing and sawing in their deltoid muscles, night and day. Suppose he had to cross one of these by night, would he ever get to the other side? Or would angels from heaven come down and hold him back?

The cornet and his mother had a conversation about him. Bawled the cornet into the ear-trumpet:

"My fellow Simpson is very bad, mother. He is getting low and nervous, and I don't like the looks of him."

"I remarked it myself," said the old lady. "We had better have Bright. It would be cheaper to pay five guineas, and get a good opinion at once."

"I expect he wants a surgeon more than a doctor," said the cornet.

"Well, that is the doctor's business," said the old lady. "Drop a line to Bright, and see what he says. It would be a burning shame, my dear — enough to bring down the wrath of God upon us — if we were to let him want for anything as long as we have money. And we have plenty of money. More than we want. And if it annoys him to go near the horses, we must pension him. But I would rather let him believe that he was earning his wages, because it might be a weight on his mind if we did not. See to it the first thing in the morning. Remember Balaclava, John! Remember Balaclava! If you forget Balaclava, and what trooper Simpson did for you there, you are tempting God to forget you."

"I hope he may when I do, mother," shouted the cornet. "I remember Balaclava — ay, and Devna before."

There are such people as these in the world, reader. I know some of them. I know a great many of them. So many of them, in fact, that this conclusion has been forced upon me — that the world is *not* entirely peopled by rogues and fools; nay, more, that the rogues and fools form a contemptible minority. I may become unpopular,

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I may be sneered at by men who think themselves wiser, for coming to such a conclusion ; but I will not retract what I have said. The good people in the world outnumber the bad, ten to one, and the ticket for this sort of belief is " Optimist."

This conversation between the cornet and his mother took place at half-past two. At that time Charles had crept across the park to the Mews, near Belgrave Square, to see his friend the duke's coachman and his son. May I be allowed, without being accused of writing a novel in the " confidential style," to tell you, that this is the most important day in the whole story.

At half-past two, William Ravenshoe called at Lord Hainault's house in Grosvenor Square. He saw Lady Ascot. Lady Ascot asked him what sort of weather it was out of doors.

William said that there was a thick fog near the river, but that on the north side of the square it was pleasant. So Lady Ascot said she would like a walk, if it were only for ten minutes, if he would give her his arm ; and out they went.

Mary and the children came out too, but they went into the square. Lady Ascot and William walked slowly up and down the pavement alone, for Lady Ascot liked to see the people.

Up and down the north side, in front of the house. At the second turn, when they were within twenty yards of the west end of the square, a tall man with an umbrella over his shoulder came round the corner, and leant against the lamp-post. They both knew him in an instant. It was Lord Ascot. He had not seen them. He had turned to look at a great long-legged chesnut that was coming down the street, from the right, with a human being on his back. The horse was desperately vicious, but very beautiful and valuable. The groom on his back was neither beautiful nor valuable, and was losing his temper with the horse. The horse was one of those horses vicious

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by nature — such a horse as Rarey (all honour to him) can terrify into submission for a short time ; and the groom was a groom, not one of our country lads, every one of whose virtues and vices have been discussed over and over again at the squire's dinner-table, or about whom the rector has scratched his head, and had into his study for private exhortation or encouragement. Not one of the minority. One of the majority, I very much fear. Reared like a dog among the straw, without education, without religion, without self-respect — worse broke than the horse he rode. When I think of all that was said against grooms and stable-helpers during the Rarey fever, I get very angry, I confess it. One man said to me, " When we have had a groom or two killed, we shall have our horses treated properly." Look to your grooms, gentlemen, and don't allow such a blot on the fair fame of England as some racing stables much longer, or there will be a heavy reckoning against you when the books are balanced.

But the poor groom lost his temper with the horse, and beat it over the head. And Lord Ascot stayed to say, " D—— it all, man, you will never do any good like that ;" though a greater fiend on horseback than Lord Ascot I never saw.

This gave time for Lady Ascot to say, " Come on, my dear Ravenshoe, and let us speak to him." So on they went. Lord Ascot was so busy looking at the horse and groom, that they got close behind him before he saw them. Nobody being near, Lady Ascot, with a sparkle of her old fun, poked him in the back with her walking-stick. Lord Ascot turned sharply and angrily round, with his umbrella raised for a blow.

When he saw who it was, he burst out into a pleasant laugh. " Now, you grandma," he said, " you keep that old stick of yours quiet, or you'll get into trouble. What do you mean by assaulting the head of the house in the public streets ? I am ashamed of you. You, Ravenshoe,

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you egged her on to do it. I shall have to punch your head before I have done. How are you both?"

"And where have you been, you naughty boy?" said Lady Ascot.

"At Paris," said that ingenuous nobleman, "dicing and brawling as usual. Nobody can accuse me of hiding *my* talents in a napkin, grandma. Those two things are all I am fit for, and I certainly do them with a will. I have fought a duel, too. A Yankee Doodle got it into his head that he might be impertinent to Adelaide; so I took him out and shot him. Don't cry, now. He is not dead. He'll walk lame though, I fancy, for a time. How jolly it is to catch you out here. I dread meeting that insufferable prig, Hainault, for fear I should kick him. Give me her arm, my dear Ravenshoe."

"And where is Adelaide?" said Lady Ascot.

"Up at St. John's Wood," said he. "Do steal away, and come and see her. Grandma, I was very sorry to hear of poor Charles' death — I was indeed. You know what it has done for me; but, by Gad, I was very sorry."

"Dear Welter — dear Ascot," said Lady Ascot, "I am sure you were sorry. Oh! if you would repent, my own dear. If you would think of the love that Christ bore you when He died for you. Oh Ascot, Ascot! will nothing save you from the terrible hereafter?"

"I am afraid not, grandma," said Lord Ascot. "It is getting too cold for you to stay out. Ravenshoe, my dear fellow, take her in."

And so, after a kind good-bye, Lord Ascot walked away towards the south-west.

I am afraid that John Marston was right. I am afraid he spoke the truth when he said that Lord Ascot was a savage, untameable blackguard.

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Chapter XXIII

Lord Ascot's Crowning Act of Folly

LORD ASCOT, with his umbrella over his shoulder, swung on down the street, south-westward. The town was pleasant in the higher parts, and so he felt inclined to prolong his walk. He turned to the right into Park Lane.

He was a remarkable-looking man. So tall, so broad, with such a mighty chest, and such a great, red, hairless, cruel face above it, that people, when he paused to look about him, as he did at each street corner, turned to look at him. He did not notice it; he was used to it. And, besides, as he walked there were two or three words ringing yet in his ears which made him look less keenly than usual after the handsome horses and pretty faces which he met in his walk.

"Oh, Ascot, Ascot! will nothing save you from the terrible hereafter?"

"Confound those old women, more particularly when they take to religion. Always croaking. And grandma Ascot, too, as plucky and good an old soul as any in England — as good a judge of a horse as William Day — taking to that sort of thing. Hang it! it was unendurable. It was bad taste, you know, putting such ideas into a fellow's head. London was dull enough after Paris, without that."

So thought Lord Ascot, as he stood in front of Dudley House, and looked southward. The winter sun was feebly shining where he was, but to the south there was a sea of fog, out of which rose the Wellington statue, looking more exasperating than ever, and the two great houses at the Albert Gate.

"This London is a beastly hole," said he. "I have got *to go down* into that cursed fog. I wish Tattersalls' was

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anywhere else." But he shouldered his umbrella again, and on he went.

Opposite St. George's Hospital there were a number of medical students. Two of them, regardless of the order which should always be kept on her Majesty's highway, were wrestling. Lord Ascot paused for a moment to look at them. He heard one of the students who were looking on say to another, evidently about himself :

"By Gad ! what preparations that fellow would cut up into."

"Ah !" said another, "and wouldn't he cuss and d— under operation neither."

"I know who that is," said a third. "That's Lord Ascot ; the most infernal, headlong, gambling savage in the three kingdoms."

So Lord Ascot, in the odour of sanctity, passed down into Tattersalls' yard. There was no one in the rooms. He went out into the yard again.

"Hullo, you sir ! Have you seen Mr. Sloane ? "

"Mr. Sloane was here not ten minutes ago, my lord. He thought your lordship was not coming. He is gone down to the Groom's Arms."

"Where the deuce is that ? "

"In Chapel Street, at the corner of the mews, my lord. Fust turning on the right, my lord."

Lord Ascot had business with our old acquaintance Mr. Sloane, and went on. When he came to the public-house mentioned (the very same one in which the Servants' Club was held, to which Charles belonged), he went into the bar, and asked of a feeble-minded girl, left accidentally in charge of the bar — "Where was Mr. Sloane ? " And she said, "Upstairs, in the club-room."

Lord Ascot walked up to the club-room, and looked in at the glass door. And there he saw Sloane. He was standing up, with his hand on a man's shoulder, who had a map before him. Right and left of these two men were two other men, an old one and a young one, and the four

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faces were close together ; and while he watched them, the man with the map before him looked up, and Lord Ascot saw Charles Ravenshoe, pale and wan, looking like death itself, but still Charles Ravenshoe in the body.

He did not open the door. He turned away, went down into the street, and set his face northward.

So he was alive, and — There were more things to follow that "and" than he had time to think of at first. He had a cunning brain, Lord Ascot, but he could not get at his position at first. The whole business was too unexpected — he had not time to realize it.

The afternoon was darkening as he turned his steps northwards, and began to walk rapidly, with scowling face and compressed lips. One or two of the students still lingered on the steps of the hospital. The one who had mentioned him by name before said to his fellows, " Look at that Lord Ascot. What a devil he looks. He has lost some money. Gad ! there'll be murder done to-night. They oughtn't to let such fellows go loose ! "

Charles Ravenshoe alive. And Lord Saltire's will. Half a million of money. And Charley Ravenshoe, the best old cock in the three kingdoms. Of all his villainies — and, God forgive him, they were many — the one that weighed heaviest on his heart was his treatment of Charles. And now —

The people turned and looked after him as he hurled along. Why did his wayward feet carry him to the corner of Curzon Street ? That was not his route to St. John's Wood. The people stared at the great red-faced giant, who paused against the lamp-post irresolute, biting his upper lip till the blood came. How would they have stared if they had seen what I see.*

There were two angels in the street that wretched winter afternoon, who had followed Lord Ascot in his headlong

* Perhaps a reference to " The Wild Huntsman " will stop all criticism at this point. A further reference to " Faust " will also show that I am in good company.

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course, and paused here. He could see them but dimly, or only guess at their existence, but I can see them plainly enough.

One was a white angel, beautiful to look at, who stood a little way off, beckoning to him, and pointing towards Lord Saltire's house; and the other was black, with its face hid in a hood, who was close beside him and kept saying in his ear, "Half a million! half a million!"

A strange apparition in Curzon Street, at four o'clock on a January afternoon! Gibbon lays great stress on no contemporary historian having noticed the darkness at the Crucifixion. If you search the files of the papers at this period, you will find no notice of any remarkable atmospheric phenomena in Curzon Street that afternoon. But two angels were there nevertheless, and Lord Ascot had a dim suspicion of it.

A dim suspicion of it! How could it be otherwise, when he heard a voice in one ear repeating Lady Ascot's last words, "What can save you from the terrible hereafter?" and in the other the stealthy whisper of the fiend, "Half a million! half a million!"

He paused only for a moment, and then headed northward again. The black angel was at his ear, but the white one was close to him — so close, that when his own door opened, the three passed in together. Adelaide, standing under the chandelier in the hall, saw nothing of the two spirits; only her husband, scowling fiercely.

She was going upstairs to dress, but she paused. As soon as Lord Ascot's "confidential scoundrel," before mentioned, had left the hall, she came up to him, and in a whisper, for she knew the man was listening, said:

"What is the matter, Welter?"

He looked as if he would have pushed her out of the way. But he did not. He said:

"I have seen Charles Ravenshoe."

"When?"

"To-night."

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"Good God ! Then it is almost a matter of time with us," said Adelaide, "I had a dim suspicion of this, Ascot. It is horrible. We are ruined."

"Not yet," said Lord Ascot.

"There is time — time. He is obstinate and mad. Lord Saltire might die —"

"Well ?"

"Either of them," she hissed out. "Is there no —"

"No what ?"

"There is a half a million of money," said Adelaide.

"Well ?"

"All sorts of things happen to people."

Lord Ascot looked at her for an instant, and snarled out a curse at her.

John Marston was perfectly right. He was a savage, untameable blackguard. He went upstairs into his bedroom. The two angels were with him. They are with all of us at such times as these. There is no plagiarism here. The fact is too old for that.

Up and down, up and down. The bed-room was not long enough ; so he opened the door of the dressing-room ; and that was not long enough ; and so he opened the door of what had been the nursery in a happier household than his, and walked up and down through them all. And Adelaide sat below, before a single candle, with pale face and clenched lips, listening to his footfall on the floor above.

She knew as well as if an angel had told her what was passing in his mind as he walked up and down. She had foreseen this crisis plainly — you may laugh at me, but she had. She had seen that if, by any wild conjunction of circumstances, Charles Ravenshoe were alive, and if he were to come across him before Lord Saltire's death, events would arrange themselves exactly as they were doing on this terrible evening. There was something awfully strange in the realization of her morbid suspicions.

Yes, she had seen thus far, and had laughed at herself for entertaining such mad fancies. But she had seen no

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further. What the upshot would be was hidden from her like a dark veil. Black and impenetrable as the fog which was hanging over Waterloo Bridge at that moment, which made the squalid figure of a young, desperate girl show like a pale, fluttering ghost, leading a man whom we know well, a man who followed her, on the road to — what?

The rest, though, seemed to be, in some sort, in her own hands. Wealth, position in the world, the power of driving her chariot over the necks of those who had scorned her — the only things for which her worthless heart cared — were all at stake. "He will murder me," she said, "*but he shall hear me.*"

Still, up and down, over head, his heavy footfall went to and fro.

Seldom, in any man's life, comes such a trial as his this night. A good man might have been hard tried in such circumstances. What hope can we have of a desperate blackguard like Lord Ascot? He knew Lord Saltire hated him; he knew that Lord Saltire had only left his property to him because he thought Charles Ravenshoe was dead; and yet he hesitated whether or no he should tell Lord Saltire that he had seen Charles, and ruin himself utterly.

Was he such an utter rascal as John Marston made him out? Would such a rascal have hesitated long? What could make a man without a character, without principle, without a care about the world's opinion, hesitate at such a time like this? I cannot tell you.

He was not used to think about things logically or calmly; and so, as he paced up and down, it was some time before he actually arranged his thoughts. Then he came to this conclusion, and put it fairly before him — that, if he let Lord Saltire know that Charles Ravenshoe was alive, he was ruined; and that, if he did not, he was a villain.

Let us give the poor profligate wretch credit for getting even so far as this. There was no attempt to gloss over

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the facts and deceive himself. He put the whole matter honestly before him.

He would be a fool if he told Lord Saltire. He would be worse than a fool, a madman — there was no doubt about that. It was not to be thought about.

But Charles Ravenshoe !

How pale the dear old lad looked. What a kind, gentle old face it was. How well he could remember the first time he ever saw him. At Twyford, yes ; and, that very same visit, how he ran across the billiard-room, and asked him who Lord Saltire was. Yes. What jolly times there were down in Devonshire, too. Those Claycomb hounds wanted pace, but they were full fast enough for the country. And what a pottering old rascal Charley was among the stone walls. Rode through. Yes. And how he'd mow over a woodcock. Fire slap through a holly bush. Ha !

And suppose they proved this previous marriage. Why, then he would be back at Ravenshoe, and all things would be as they were. But suppose they couldn't —

Lord Ascot did not know that eighty thousand pounds were secured to Charles.

By Gad ! it was horrible to think of. That it should be thrown on him, of all men, to stand between old Charley and his due. If it were any other man but him —

Reader, if you do not know that a man will act from "sentiment" long, long years after he has thrown "principle" to the winds, you had better pack up your portmanteau, and go and live five years or more among Australian convicts and American rowdies, as a friend of mine did. The one long outlives the other. The incarnate devils who beat out poor Price's brains with their shovels, when they had the gallows before them, consistently perjured themselves in favour of the youngest of the seven, the young fiend who had hounded them on.

Why there never was such a good fellow as that Charley. That Easter vacation — hey ! Among the bargees,

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hang it, what a game it was — I won't follow out his recollections here any further. Skittle-playing and fighting are all very well ; but one may have too much of them.

"I might still do this," thought Lord Ascot ; "I might —"

At this moment he was opposite the dressing-room door. It was opened, and Adelaide stood before him.

Beautiful and terrible, with a look which her husband had, as yet, only seen shadowed dimly — a look which he felt might come there some day, but which he had never seen yet. The light of her solitary candle shone upon her pale face, her gleaming eyes, and her clenched lip ; and he saw what was written there, and for one moment quailed.

("If you were to say to me," said Lord Hainault once, "that Charles would be unwise to let Ascot's wife make his gruel for him, I should agree with you.")

Only for one moment ! Then he turned on her and cursed her.

"What, in the name of Hell, do you want here at *this* moment ?"

"You may murder me if you like, Ascot ; but before you have time to do that, you shall hear what I have got to say. I have been listening to your footsteps for a weary hour, and I heard irresolution in every one of them. Ascot, don't be a madman !"

"I shall be soon, if you come at such a time as this, and look like that. If my face were to take the same expression as yours has now, Lady Ascot, these would be dangerous quarters for you."

"I know that," she said. "I knew all that before I came up here to-night, Ascot. Ascot, half a million of money —"

"Why, all the devils in the pit have been singing that tune for an hour past. Have you only endangered your life to add your little pipe to theirs ?"

"I have. Won't you hear me ?"

"No. Go away."

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"Are you going to do it?"

"Most likely not. You had better go away."

"You might give him a hundred thousand pounds, you know, Ascot. Four thousand a year. The poor dear fellow would worship you for your generosity. He is a very good fellow, Ascot."

"You had better go away," said he, quietly.

"Not without a promise, Ascot. Think —"

"Now go away. This is the last warning I give you. Madwoman!"

"But, Ascot —"

"Take care; it will be too late for both of us in another moment."

She caught his eyes for the first time, and fled for her life. She ran down into the drawing-room, and threw herself into a chair. "God preserve me!" she said, "I have gone too far with him. Oh, this lonely house!"

Every drop of blood in her body seemed to fly to her heart. There were footsteps outside the door. Oh, God! have mercy on her; he was following her.

Where were the two angels now, I wonder?

He opened the door, and came towards her slowly. If mortal agony can atone for sin, she atoned for all her sins in that terrible half-minute. She did not cry out; she dared not; she writhed down among the gaudy cushions, with her face buried in her hands, and waited — for what?

She heard a voice speaking to her. It was not his voice, but the kind voice of old Lord Ascot, his dead father. It said —

"Adelaide, my poor girl, you must not get frightened when I get in a passion. My poor child, you have borne enough for me; I would not hurt a hair of your head."

He kissed her cheek, and Adelaide burst into a passion of sobs. After a few moments those sobs had ceased, and Lord Ascot left her. He did not know that she had fainted away. She never told him that.

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Where were the angels now? Angels! — there was but one of them left. Which one was that, think you?

Hurrah! the good angel. The black fiend with the hood had sneaked away to his torment. And, as Lord Ascot closed the door behind him, and sped away down the foggy street, the good one vanished too; for the work was done. Ten thousand fiends would not turn him from his purpose now. Hurrah!

* * * * *

"Simpson," said Lord Saltire, as he got into bed that evening, "it won't last much longer."

"What will not last, my lord?" said Simpson.

"Why, me," said Lord Saltire, disregarding grammar. "Don't set up a greengrocer's shop, Simpson; nor a butter and egg shop, in Berkeley Street, if you can help it, Simpson. If you must keep a lodging-house, I should say Jermyn Street; but don't let me influence you. I am not sure that I wouldn't sooner see you in Brook Street, or Conduit Street. But don't try Pall Mall, that's a good fellow; or you'll be getting fast men, who will demoralize your establishment. A steady connexion among government clerks and that sort of person will pay best in the long run."

"My dear lord — my good old friend, why should you talk like this to-night?"

"Because I am very ill, Simpson, and it will all come at once; and it may come any time. When they open Lord Barkham's room, at Cottingdean, I should like you and Mr. Marston to go in first, for I may have left something or another about."

An hour or two after, his bell rang, and Simpson, who was in the dressing-room, came hurriedly in. He was sitting up in bed, looking just the same as usual.

"My good fellow," he said, "go down and find out who rung and knocked at the door like that. Did you hear it?"

"I did not notice it, my lord."

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"Butchers, and bakers, and that sort of people, don't knock and ring like that. The man at the door now brings news, Simpson. There is no mistake about the ring of a man who comes with important intelligence. Go down and see."

He was not long gone. When he came back again, he said :

"It is Lord Ascot, my lord. He insists on seeing you immediately."

"Up with him, Simpson — up with him, my good fellow. I told you so. This gets interesting."

Lord Ascot was already in the doorway. Lord Saltire's brain was as acute as ever ; and, as Lord Ascot approached him, he peered eagerly and curiously at him, in the same way as one scrutinizes the seal of an unopened letter, and wonders what its contents may be. Lord Ascot sat down by the bed, and whispered to the old man ; and, when Simpson saw his great, coarse, red, hairless, ruffianly face actually touching that of Lord Saltire, so delicate, so refined, so keen, Simpson began to have a dim suspicion that he was looking on rather a remarkable sight. And so he was.

"Lord Saltire," said Lord Ascot, "I have seen Charles Ravenshoe to-night."

"You are quite sure ? "

"I am quite sure."

"Ha ! Ring the bell, Simpson." Before any one had spoken again, a footman was in the room. "Bring the major-domo here instantly," said Lord Saltire.

"You know what you have done, Ascot," said Lord Saltire. "You see what you have done. I am going to send for my solicitor, and alter my will."

"Of course you are," said Lord Ascot. "Do you dream I did not know that before I came here ? "

"And yet you came ? "

"Yes ; with all the devils out of hell dragging me back."

"As a matter of curiosity, why ? " said Lord Saltire.

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"Oh, I couldn't do it, you know. I've done a good many dirty things; but I couldn't do that, particularly to that man. There are some things a fellow can't do, you know."

"Where did you see him?"

"At the Groom's Arms, Belgrave Mews; he was there not three hours ago. Find a man called Sloane, a horse-dealer; he will tell you all about him; for he was sitting with his hand on his shoulder. His address is twenty-seven, New Road."

At this time the major-domo appeared. "Take a cab at once, and *fetch* me — you understand when I say *fetch* — Mr. Brogden, my solicitor. Mr. Compton lives out of town, but he lives over the office in Lincoln's Inn. If you can get hold of the senior partner, he will do as well. Put either of them in a cab and pack them off here. Then go to Scotland Yard; give my compliments to Inspector Field; tell him a horrible murder has been committed, accompanied by arson, forgery, and regrating, with a strong suspicion of sorning, and that he must come at once."

That venerable gentleman disappeared, and then Lord Saltire said:

"Do you repent, Ascot?"

"No," said he. "D— it all, you know, I could not do it when I came to think of it. The money would never have stayed with me, I take it. Good night."

"Good night," said Lord Saltire; "come the first thing in the morning."

And so they parted. Simpson said, "Are you going to alter your will to-night, my lord? Won't it be a little too much for you?"

"It would be if I was going to do so, Simpson; but I am not going to touch a line of it. I am not sure that half a million of money was ever, in the history of the world, given up with better grace or with less reason. He is a noble fellow; I never guessed it; he shall have it —

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by Jove, he shall have it ! I am going to sleep. Apologize to Brogden, and give the information to Field ; tell him I expect Charles Ravenshoe here to-morrow morning. Good night."

Simpson came in to open the shutters next morning ; but those shutters were not open for ten days, for Lord Saltire was dead.

Dead. The delicate waxen right hand, covered with rings, was lying outside on the snow-white sheet, which was unwrinkled by any death agony ; and on the pillow was a face, beautiful always, but now more beautiful, more calm, more majestic than ever. If his first love, dead so many years, had met him in the streets but yesterday, she would not have known him ; but if she could have looked one moment on the face which lay on that pillow, she would have seen once more the gallant young nobleman who came a-wooing under the lime-trees sixty years ago.

The inspector was rapid and dexterous in his work. He was on Charles Ravenshoe's trail like a bloodhound, eager to redeem the credit which his coadjutor, Yard, had lost over the same case. But his instructions came to him three hours too late.

Chapter XXIV

The Bridge at Last

THE group which Lord Ascot had seen through the glass doors, consisted of Charles, the coachman's son, the coachman, and Mr. Sloane. Charles and the coachman's son had got hold of a plan of the battle of Balaclava, from the *Illustrated London News*, and were explaining the whole thing to the two older men, to their great delight. The four got enthusiastic and prolonged the talk for some time ; and, when it began to flag, Sloane said he must go home, and so they came down into the bar.

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Here a discussion arose about the feeding of cavalry horses, in which all four were perfectly competent to take part. The two young men were opposed in argument to the two elder ones, and they were having a right pleasant chatter about the corn or hay question in the bar, when the swing doors were pushed open, and a girl entered and looked round with that bold, insolent expression one only sees among a certain class.

A tawdry draggled-looking girl, finely enough dressed, but with everything awry and dirty. Her face was still almost beautiful; but the cheekbones were terribly prominent, and the hectic patch of red on her cheeks, and the parched cracked lips, told of pneumonia developing into consumption.

Such a figure had probably never appeared in that decent aristocratic public-house, called the Groom's Arms, since it had got its licence. The four men ceased their argument and turned to look at her; and the coachman, a family man with daughters, said, "Poor thing!"

With a brazen, defiant look she advanced to the bar. The barmaid, a very beautiful, quiet-looking, Londonbred girl, advanced towards her, frightened at such a wild tawdry apparition, and asked her mechanically what she would please to take.

"I don't want nothing to drink, miss," said the girl; "leastways, I've got no money; but I want to ask a question. I say, miss, you couldn't give a poor girl one of them sandwiches, could you? You will never miss it, you know."

The barmaid's father, the jolly landlord, eighteen stone of good humour, was behind his daughter now.

"Give her a porkpie, Jane, and a glass of ale, my girl."

"God Almighty bless you, sir, and keep her from the dark places where the devil lies awaiting. I didn't come here to beg — it was only when I see them sandwiches that it come over me — I come here to ask a question. I know it ain't no use. But you can't see him — can't see

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him — can't see him," she continued, sobbing wildly, "rattling his poor soul away, and do not do as he asked you. I didn't come to get out for a walk. I sat there patient three days, and would have sat there till the end, but he would have me come. And so I came; and I must get back — get back."

The landlord's daughter brought her some food; and, as her eyes gleamed with wolfish hunger, she stopped speaking. It was a strange group. She in the centre, tearing at her food in a way terrible to see. Behind, the calm face of the landlord, looking on her with pity and wonder; and his pretty daughter, with her arm round his waist, and her head on his bosom, with tears in her eyes. Our four friends stood to the right, silent and curious — a remarkable group enough; for neither the duke's coachman, nor Mr. Sloane, who formed the background, were exactly ordinary-looking men; and in front of them were Charles and the coachman's son, who had put his head on Charles's right shoulder, and was peering over his left at the poor girl, so that the two faces were close together — the one handsome and pale, with the mouth hidden by a moustache; the other, Charles's, wan and wild, with the lips parted in eager curiosity, and the chin thrust slightly forward.

In a few minutes the girl looked round on them. "I said I'd come here to ask a question; and I must ask it and get back. There was a gentleman's groom used to use this house, and I want him. His name was Charles Horton. If you, sir, or if any of these gentlemen, know where I can find him, in God Almighty's name tell me this miserable night."

Charles was pale before, but he grew more deadly pale now; his heart told him something was coming. His comrade, the coachman's son, held his hand tighter still on his shoulder, and looked in his face. Sloane and the coachman made an exclamation.

Charles said quietly, "My poor girl, I am the man you

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are looking for. What, in God's name, do you want with me?" and, while he waited for her to answer, he felt all the blood in his body going towards his heart.

"Little enough," she said. "Do you mind a little shoe-black boy as used to stand by St. Peter's Church?"

"Do I?" said Charles, coming towards her. "Yes, I do. My poor little lad. You don't mean to say that you know anything about him?"

"I am his sister, sir; and he is dying; and he says he won't die not till you come. And I come off to see if I could find you. Will you come with me and see him?"

"Will I come!" said Charles. "Let us go at once. My poor little monkey. Dying too!"

"Poor little man," said the coachman. "A many times I've heard you speak of him. Let's all go."

Mr. Sloane and his son seconded this motion.

"You mustn't come," said the girl. "There's a awful row in the court to-night; that's the truth. He's safe enough with me; but if you come, they'll think a mob's being raised. Now, don't talk of coming."

"You had better let me go alone," said Charles. "I feel sure that it would not be right for more of us to follow this poor girl than she chooses. I am ready."

And so he followed the girl out into the darkness; and, as soon as they were outside, she turned and said to him —

"You'd best follow me from a distance. I'll tell you why: I expect the police wants me, and you might get into trouble from being with me. Remember, if I am took, it's Marquis Court, Little Marjoram Street, and it's the end house, exactly opposite you as you go in. If you stands at the archway, and sings out for Miss Ophelia Flanigan, she'll come to you. But if the row ain't over, you wait till they're quiet. Whatever you do, don't venture in by yourself, however quiet it may look: sing out for her."

And so she fluttered away through the fog, and he followed, walking fast to keep her in sight.

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It was a dreadful night. The fog had lifted, and a moaning wind had arisen, with rain from the south-west. A wild, dripping, melancholy night, without rain enough to make one think of physical discomfort, and without wind enough to excite one.

The shoeblacks and the crossing-sweepers were shouldering their brooms and their boxes, and were plodding homewards. The costermongers were letting their barrows stand in front of the public-houses, while they went in to get something to drink, and were discussing the price of vegetables there, and being fetched out by dripping policemen, for obstructing her Majesty's highway. The beggars were gathering their rags together, and posting homewards; let us charitably suppose, to their bit of fish, with guinea-fowl and sea kale afterwards, or possibly, for it was not late in February, to their boiled pheasant and celery sauce. Every one was bound for shelter but the policemen. And Charles — poor, silly, obstinate Charles, with an earl's fortune waiting for him, dressed as a groom, pale, wan, and desperate — was following a ruined girl, more desperate even than he, towards the bridge.

Yes; this is the darkest part of my whole story. Since his misfortunes he had let his mind dwell a little too much on these bridges. There are very few men without a cobweb of some sort in their heads, more or less innocent. Charles had a cobweb in his head now. The best of men might have a cobweb in his head after such a terrible breakdown in his affairs as he had suffered; more especially if he had three or four splinters of bone in his deltoid muscle, which had prevented his sleeping for three nights. But I would sooner that any friend of mine should at such times take to any form of folly (such even as having fifty French clocks in the room, and discharging the butler if they did not all strike at once, as one good officer and brave fellow did) rather than get to thinking about bridges after dark, with the foul water lapping and swirling about *the piers*. I have hinted to you about this crotchet of

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poor Charles for a long time ; I was forced to do so. I think the less we say about it the better. I call you to witness that I have not said more about it than was necessary.

At the end of Arabella Row, the girl stopped, and looked back for him. The Mews' clock was overhead, a broad orb of light in the dark sky. Ten minutes past ten. Lord Ascot was sitting beside Lord Saltire's bed, and Lord Saltire had rung the bell to send for Inspector Field.

She went on, and he followed her along the Mall. She walked fast, and he had hard work to keep her in sight. He saw her plainly enough whenever she passed a lamp. Her shadow was suddenly thrown at his feet, and then swept in a circle to the right, till it overtook her, and then passed her, and grew dim till she came to another lamp, and then came back to his feet, and passed on to her again, beckoning him on to follow her, and leading her — whither ?

How many lamps were there ? One, two, three, four ; and then a man lying asleep on a bench in the rain, who said, with a wild, wan face, when the policeman roused him, and told him to go home, " My home is in the Thames, friend ; but I shall not go there to-night, or perhaps to-morrow."

" His home was in the Thames." The Thames, the dear old happy river. The wonder and delight of his boyhood. That was the river that slept in crystal green depths, under the tumbled boulders fallen from the chalk cliff, where the ivy, the oak, and the holly grew ; and then went spouting, and raging, and roaring through the weirs at Casterton, where he and Welter used to bathe, and where he lay and watched kind Lord Ascot spinning patiently through one summer afternoon, till he killed the eight-pound trout at sundown.

That was the dear old Thames. But that was fifty miles up the river, and ages ago. Now, and here, the river

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had got foul, and lapped about hungry among piles, and barges, and the buttresses of bridges. And lower down it ran among mud banks. And there was a picture of one of them, by dear old H. K. Browne, and you didn't see at first what it was that lay among the sedges, because the face was reversed, and the limbs were —

They passed in the same order through Spring Gardens into the Strand. And then Charles found it more troublesome than ever to follow the goor girl in her rapid walk. There were so many like her there : but she walked faster than any of them. Before he came to the street which leads to Waterloo Bridge, he thought he had lost her ; but when he turned the corner, and as the dank wind smote upon his face, he came upon her, waiting for him.

And so they went on across the bridge. They walked together now. Was she frightened, too ?

When they reached the other end of the bridge, she went on again to show the way. A long way on past the Waterloo Station she turned to the left. They passed out of a broad, low, noisy street, into other streets, some quiet, some turbulent, some blazing with the gas of miserable shops, some dark and stealthy, with only one or two figures in them, which disappeared round corners, or got into dark archways as they passed. Charles saw that they were getting into "Queer Street."

How that poor gaudy figure fluttered on ! How it paused at each turning to look back for him, and then fluttered on once more ! What innumerable turnings there were ! How should he ever find his way back — back to the bridge ?

At last she turned into a street of greengrocers, and marine store-keepers, in which the people were all at their house doors looking out : all looking in one direction, and talking so earnestly to one another, that even his top-boots escaped notice : which struck him as being remarkable, as nearly all the way from Waterloo Bridge a majority of the populace had criticised them, either ironically ; or

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openly, in an unfavourable manner. He thought they were looking at a fire, and turned his head in the same direction ; he only saw the poor girl, standing at the mouth of a narrow entry watching for him.

He came up to her. A little way down a dark alley was an archway, and beyond there were lights, and a noise of a great many people shouting, and talking, and screaming. The girl stole on, followed by Charles a few steps, and then drew suddenly back. The whole of the alley, and the dark archway beyond, was lined with policemen.

A brisk-looking, middle-sized man, with intensely black scanty whiskers, stepped out, and stood before them. Charles saw at once that it was the inspector of police.

"Now then, young woman," he said, sharply, "what are you bringing that young man here for, eh?"

She was obliged to come forward. She began wringing her hands.

"Mr. Inspector," she said, "sir, I wish I may be struck dead, sir, if I don't tell the truth. It's my poor little brother, sir. He's a dying in number eight, sir, and he sent for this young man for to see him, sir. Oh! don't stop us, sir. S'elp me —"

"Pish!" said the inspector; "what the devil is the use of talking this nonsense to me? As for you, young man, you march back home double quick. You've no business here. It's seldom we see a gentleman's servant in such company in this part of the town."

"Pooh! pooh! my good sir," said Charles; "stuff and nonsense. Don't assume that tone with me, if you will have the goodness. What the young woman says is perfectly correct. If you can assist me to get to that house at the further end of the court, where the poor boy lies dying, I shall be obliged to you. If you can't, don't express an opinion without being in possession of circumstances. You may detain the girl, but I am going on. You don't know who you are talking to."

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How the old Oxford insolence flashed out even at the last.

The Inspector drew back and bowed. "I must do my duty, sir. Dickson!"

Dickson, in whose beat the court was, as he knew by many a sore bone in his body, came forward. He said, "Well, sir, I won't deny that the young woman is Bess, and perhaps she may be on the cross, and I don't go to say that what with flimping, and with cly-faking, and such like, she mayn't be wanted some day like her brother the Nipper was; but she is a good young woman, and a honest young woman in her way, and what she says this night about her brother is gospel truth."

"Flimping" is a style of theft which I have never practised, and, consequently, of which I know nothing. "Cly-faking" is stealing pocket-handkerchiefs. I never practised this either, never having had sufficient courage or dexterity. But, at all events, Police-constable Dickson's notion of "an honest young woman in her way" seems to me to be confused and unsatisfactory in the last degree.

The inspector said to Charles, "Sir, if gentlemen disguise themselves they must expect the police to be somewhat at fault till they open their mouths. Allow me to say, sir, that in putting on your servant's clothes you have done the most foolish thing you possibly could. You are on an errand of mercy, it appears, and I will do what I can for you. There's a doctor and a Scripture reader somewhere in the court now, so our people say. *They* can't get out. I don't think you have much chance of getting in."

"By Jove!" said Charles, "do you know that you are a deuced good fellow? I am sorry that I was rude to you, but I am in trouble, and irritated. I hope you'll forgive me."

"Not another word, sir," said the inspector. "Come *and* look here, sir. You may never see such a sight *again*."

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Our people daren't go in. This, sir, is, I believe, about the worst court in London."

"I thought," said Charles, quite forgetting his top-boots, and speaking "*de haut en bas*," as in old times — "I thought that your Rosemary Lane carried off the palm as being a lively neighbourhood?"

"Lord bless you," said the inspector, "nothing to this; — look here."

They advanced to the end of the arch, and looked in. It was as still as death, but it was as light as day, for there were candles burning in every window.

"Why," said Charles, "the court is empty. I can run across. Let me go; I am certain I can get across."

"Don't be a lunatic, sir," said the inspector, holding him tight; "wait till I give you the word, unless you want six months in Guy's Hospital."

Charles soon saw the inspector was right. There were three houses on each side of the court. The centre one on the right was a very large one, which was approached on each side by a flight of three steps, guarded by iron railings, which, in meeting, formed a kind of platform or rostrum. This was Mr. Malone's house, whose wife chose, for family reasons, to call herself Miss Ophelia Flanigan.

The court was silent and hushed, when, from the door exactly opposite to this one, there appeared a tall and rather handsome young man, with a great frieze coat under one arm, and a fire-shovel over his shoulder.

This was Mr. Dennis Moriarty, junior. He advanced to the arch, so close to Charles and the inspector that they could have touched him, and then walked down the centre of the court, dragging the coat behind him, lifting his heels defiantly high at every step, and dexterously beating a "chune on the bare head of um wid the fire-shovel. Hurroo!"

He had advanced half-way down the court without a soul appearing, when suddenly the enemy poured out on him in two columns, from behind two doorways, and he

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was borne back, fighting like a hero with his fire-shovel, into one of the doors on his own side of the court. The two columns of the enemy, headed by Mr. Phelim O'Neill, uniting, poured into the doorway after him, and from the interior of the house arose a hubbub, exactly as though people were fighting on the stairs.

At this point there happened one of those mistakes which so often occur in warfare, which are disastrous at the time, and inexplicable afterwards. Can anyone explain why Lord Lucan gave that order at Balaclava? No. Can anyone explain to me, why, on this occasion, Mr. Phelim O'Neill headed the attack on the staircase in person, leaving his rear struggling in confusion in the court, by reason of their hearing the fun going on inside, and not being able to get at it? I think not. Such was the case, however, and, in the midst of it, Mr. Malone, howling like a demon, and horribly drunk, followed by thirty or forty worse than himself, dashed out of a doorway close by, and before they had time to form line of battle, fell upon them hammer and tongs.

I need not say that after this surprise in the rear, Mr. Phelim O'Neill's party had very much the worst of it. In about ten minutes, however, the two parties were standing opposite one another once more, inactive from sheer fatigue.

At this moment Miss Ophelia Flanigan appeared from the door of No. 8 — the very house that poor Charles was so anxious to get to — and slowly and majestically advanced towards the rostrum in front of her own door, and, ascending the steps, folded her arms and looked about her.

She was an uncommonly powerful, red-faced Irish-woman; her arms were bare, and she had them akimbo, and was scratching her elbows.

Every schoolboy knows that the lion has a claw at the end of his tail with which he lashes himself into fury. When the experienced hunter sees him doing that, he, so

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to speak, "hooks it." When Miss Flanigan's enemies saw her scratching her elbows, they generally did the same. She was scratching her elbows now. There was a dead silence.

One woman in that court, and one only, ever offered battle to the terrible Miss Ophelia: that was young Mrs. Phaylim O'Nale. On the present occasion she began slowly walking up and down in front of the expectant hosts. While Miss Flanigan looked on in contemptuous pity, scratching her elbows, Mrs. O'Neill opened her fire.

"Pussey, pussey!" she began, "kitty, kitty, kitty! Miaow, miaow!" (Mr. Malone had accumulated property in the cats' meat business.) "Morraow, ye little tabby divvle, don't come anighst her, my Kitleen Avourneen, or yill be convarted into sassidge mate, and sowld to keep a drunken one-eyed ould rapparee, from the county Cark, as had two months for bowling his barrer sharp round the corner of Park Lane over a ould ginal officer, in a white hat and a green silk umbereller; and as married a red-haired woman from the county Waterford, as calls herself by her maiden name, and never feels up to fighting but when the lick'er's in her, which it most in general is, pussey; and let me see the one of Malone's lot or Moriarty's lot ather, for that matter, as will deny it. Miaow!"

Miss Ophelia Flanigan blew her nose contemptuously. Some of the low characters in the court had picked her pocket.

Mrs. O'Neill quickened her pace and raised her voice. She was beginning again, when the poor girl who was with Charles ran into the court and cried out, "Miss Flanigan! I have brought him; Miss Flanigan!"

In a moment the contemptuous expression faded from Miss Flanigan's face. She came down off the steps and advanced rapidly towards where Charles stood. As she passed Mrs. O'Neill she said, "Whist now, Biddy O'Nale, me darlin. I ain't up to a shindy to-night. Ye know the rayson."

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And Mrs. O'Neill said, "Ye're a good woman, Ophelia. Sorra a one of me would have loosed tongue on ye this night, only I thought it might cheer ye up a bit after yer watching. Don't take notice of me, that's a dear."

Miss Flanigan went up to Charles, and, taking him by the arm, walked with him across the court. It was whispered rapidly that this was the young man who had been sent for to see little Billy Wilkins, who was dying in No. 8. Charles was as safe as if he had been in the centre of a square of the Guards. As he went into the door they gave him a cheer; and, when the door closed behind him, they went on with their fighting again.

Charles found himself in a squalid room, about which there was nothing remarkable but its meanness and dirt. There were four people there when he came in — a woman asleep by the bed, two gentlemen who stood aloof in the shadow, and the poor little wan and wasted boy in the bed.

Charles went up and sat by the bed; when the boy saw him he made an effort, rose half up, and threw his arms round his neck. Charles put his arm round him and supported him — as strange a pair, I fancy, as you will meet in many long days' marches.

"If you would not mind, Miss Flanigan," said the doctor, "stepping across the court with me, I shall be deeply obliged to you. You, sir, are going to stay a little longer."

"Yes, sir," said the other gentleman, in a harsh, unpleasant voice; "I shall stay till the end."

"You won't have to stay very long, my dear sir," said the doctor. "Now, Miss Flanigan, I am ready. Please to call out that the doctor is coming through the court, and that, if any man lays a finger on him, he will exhibit Croton and other drastics to him till he wishes he was dead, and after that, throw in quinine till the top of his head comes off. *Allons*, my dear madam."

With this dreadful threat the doctor departed. The other gentleman, the Scripture reader, stayed behind, and sat

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in a chair in the further corner. The poor mother was sleeping heavily. The poor girl who had brought Charles, sat down in a chair and fell asleep with her head on a table.

The dying child was gone too far for speech. He tried two or three times, but he only made a rattle in his throat. After a few minutes he took his arms from round Charles's neck, and, with a look of anxiety, felt for something by his side. When he found it he smiled, and held it towards Charles. Well, well ; it was only the ball that Charles had given him —

Charles sat on the bed, and put his left arm round the child, so that the little death's head might lie upon his breast. He took the little hand in his. So they remained. How long ?

I know not. He only sat there with the hot head against his heart, and thought that a little life, so strangely dear to him, now that all friends were gone, was fast ebbing away, and that he must get home again that night across the bridge.

The little hand that he held in his relaxed its grasp, and the boy was dead. He knew it, but he did not move. He sat there still with the dead child in his arms, with a dull terror on him, when he thought of his homeward journey across the bridge.

Some one moved and came towards him. The mother and the girl were still asleep — it was the Scripture reader. He came towards Charles, and laid his hand upon his shoulder. And Charles turned from the dead child, and looked up into his face — into the face of John Marston.

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Chapter XXV

Saved

WITH the wailing mother's voice in their ears, those two left the house. The court was quiet enough now. The poor savages who would not stop their riot lest they should disturb the dying, now talked in whispers lest they should awaken the dead.

They passed on quickly together. Not one word had been uttered between them — not one — but they pushed rapidly through the worst streets to a better part of the town, Charles clinging tight to John Marston's arm, but silent. When they got to Marston's lodgings, Charles sat down by the fire, and spoke for the first time. He did not burst out crying, or anything of that sort. He only said quietly —

"John, you have saved me. I should never have got home this night."

But John Marston, who, by finding Charles, had dashed his dearest hopes to the ground, did not take things quite so quietly. Did he think of Mary now? Did he see in a moment that his chance of her was gone? And did he not see that he loved her more deeply than ever?

"Yes," I answer to all these three questions. How did he behave now?

Why, he put his hand on Charles's shoulder, and he said, "Charles, Charles, my dear old boy, look up and speak to me in your dear old voice. Don't look wild like that. Think of Mary, my boy. She has been wooed by more than one, Charles; but I think that her heart is yours yet."

"John," said Charles, "that is what has made me hide from you all like this. I know that she loves me above all men. I dreamt of it the night I left Ravenshoe. I knew it the night I saw her at Lord Hainault's. And

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partly that she should forget a penniless and disgraced man like myself, and partly (for I have been near the gates of hell to-night, John, and can see many things) from a silly pride, I have spent all my cunning on losing myself — hoping that you would believe me dead, thinking that you would love my memory, and dreading lest you should cease to love Me."

"We loved your memory well enough, Charles. You will never know how well, till you see how well we love yourself. We have hunted you hard, Charles. How you have contrived to avoid us, I cannot guess. You do not know, I suppose, that you are a rich man?"

"A rich man?"

"Yes. Even if Lord Saltire does not alter his will, you come into three thousand a year. And, besides, you are undoubtedly heir to Ravenshoe, though one link is still wanting to prove that."

"What do you mean?"

"There is no reasonable doubt, although we cannot prove it, that your grandfather Petre was married previously to his marriage with Lady Alicia Staunton, that your father James was the real Ravenshoe, and that Ellen and yourself are the elder children, while poor Cuthbert and William —"

"Cuthbert! Does he know of this? I will hide again; I will never displace Cuthbert, mind you."

"Charles, Cuthbert will never know anything about it. Cuthbert is dead. He was drowned bathing last August."

Hush! There is something, to me, dreadful in a man's tears. I dare say that it was as well, that night, that the news of Cuthbert's death should have made him break down and weep himself into quietness again like a child. I am sure it was for the best. But it is the sort of thing that good taste forbids one to dwell upon or handle too closely.

When he was quiet again, John went on:

"It seems incredible that you should have been able to

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elude us so long. The first intelligence we had of you was from Lady Ascot, who saw you in the Park."

"Lady Ascot? I never saw my aunt in the Park."

"I mean Adelaide. She is Lady Ascot now. Lord Ascot is dead."

"Another of them!" said Charles. "John, before you go on, tell me how many more are gone."

"No more. Lady Ascot and Lord Saltire are alive and well. I was with Lord Saltire to-day, and he was talking of you. He has left the principal part of his property to Ascot. But, because none of us would believe you dead, he has made a reservation in your favour of eighty thousand pounds."

"I am all abroad," said Charles. "How is William?"

"He is very well, as he deserves to be. Noble fellow! He gave up everything to hunt you through the world like a bloodhound and bring you back. He never ceased his quest till he saw your grave at Varna."

"At Varna!" said Charles; "why, we were quartered at Devna."

"At Devna! Now, my dear old boy, I am but mortal; do satisfy my curiosity. What regiment did you enlist in?"

"In the 140th."

"Then how, in the name of all confusion," cried John Marston, "did you miss poor Hornby?"

"I did not miss Hornby," said Charles, quietly. "I had his head in my lap when he died. But now tell me, how on earth did you come to know anything about him?"

"Why, Ascot told us that you had been his servant. And he came to see us, and joined in the chase with the best of us. How is it that he never sent us any intelligence of you?"

"Because I never went near him till the film of death was on his eyes. Then he knew me again, and said a few words which I can understand now. Did he say anything *to any of you* about Ellen?"

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"About Ellen?"

"Yes. Did Ascot ever say anything either?"

"He told Lord Saltire, what I suppose you know —"

"About what?"

"About Ellen?"

"Yes, I know it all."

"And that he had met you. Now tell me what you have been doing."

"When I found that there was no chance of my remaining *perdu* any longer, and when I found that Ellen was gone, why, then I enlisted in the 140th...."

He paused here, and hid his face in his hands for some time. When he raised it again his eyes were wilder, and his speech more rapid.

"I went out with Tom Sparks and the Roman-nosed bay horse; and we ran a thousand miles in sixty-three hours. And at Devna we got wood-pigeons; and the cornet went down and dined with the 42d at Varna; and I rode the Roman-nosed bay, and he carried me through it capitally. I ask your pardon, sir, but I am only a poor discharged trooper. I would not beg, sir, if I could help it; but pain and hunger are hard things to bear, sir."

"Charles, Charles, don't you know me?"

"That is my name, sir. That is what they used to call me. I am no common beggar, sir. I was a gentleman once, sir, and rode a-horseback after a blue greyhound, and we went near to kill a black hare. I have a character from Lord Ascot, sir. I was in the light cavalry charge at Balaclava. An angry business. They shouldn't get good fellows to fight together like that. I killed one of them, sir. Hornby killed many, and he is a man who wouldn't hurt a fly. A sad business!"

"Charles, old boy, be quiet."

"When you speak to me, sir, of the distinction between the upper and lower classes, I answer you, that I have had some experience in that way of late, and have come to the conclusion that, after all, the gentleman and the cad

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are one and the same animal. Now that I am a ruined man, begging my bread about the streets, I make bold to say to you, sir, hoping that your alms may be none the less for it, that I am not sure that I do not like your cad as well as your gentleman, in his way. If I play on the one side such cards as my foster-brother William and Tom Sparks, you, of course, trump me with John Marston and the cornet. You are right ; but they are all four good fellows. I have been to death's gate to learn it. I will resume my narrative. At Devna the cornet, besides wood-pigeons, shot a francolin — "

It is just as well that this sort of thing did not come on when Charles was going home alone across the bridge ; that is all I wished to call your attention to. The next morning, Lord and Lady Hainault, old Lady Ascot, William, Mary, and Father Tiernay, were round his bed, watching the hot head rolling from side to side upon the pillow, and listening to his half-uttered delirious babble, gazing with a feeling almost of curiosity at the well-loved face which had eluded them so long.

" Oh, Hainault ! Hainault ! " said Lady Ascot, " to find him like this after all ! And Saltire dead without seeing him ! and all my fault, my fault. I am a wicked old woman ; God forgive me ! "

Lord Hainault got the greatest of the doctors into a corner, and said : —

" My dear Dr. B—, will he die ? "

" Well, yes, " said the doctor ; " to you I would sooner say yes than no, the chances are so heavy against him. The surgeons like the look of things still less than the physicians. You must really prepare for the worst. "

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Chapter XXVI

Mr. Jackson's Big Trout

OF course, he did not die ; I need not tell you that. B— and P. H— pulled him through, and shook their honest hands over his bed. Poor B— is reported to have winked on this occasion ; but such a proceeding was so unlike him, that I believe the report must have come round to us through one of the American papers — probably the same one which represented the Prince of Wales hitting the Duke of Newcastle in the eye with a champagne cork.

However, they pulled him through ; and, in the pleasant spring-time, he was carried down to Casterton. Things had gone so hard with him, that the primroses were in blossom on the southern banks before he knew that Lord Saltire was dead, and before he could be made to understand that he was a rich man.

From this much of the story we may safely deduce this moral, " That, if a young gentleman gets into difficulties, it is always as well for him to leave his address with his friends." But, as young gentlemen in difficulties generally take particularly good care to remind their friends of their whereabouts, it follows that this story has been written to little or no purpose. Unless, indeed, the reader can find for himself another moral or two ; and I am fool enough to fancy that he may do that, if he cares to take the trouble.

Casterton is built on arches, with all sorts of offices and kitchens under what would naturally be the ground floor. The reason why Casterton was built on arches (that is to say, as far as you and I are concerned) is this : that Charles, lying on the sofa in Lord Hainault's study, could look over the valley and see the river ; which, if it had been built on the ground, he could not have done. From this window he could see the great weirs spouting and foaming

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all day ; and, when he was carried up to bed, by William and Lord Hainault, he could hear the roar of them rising and sinking, as the night-wind came and went, until they lulled him to sleep.

He lay here one day, when the doctors came down from London. And one of them put a handkerchief over his face, which smelt like chemical experiments, and somehow reminded him of Dr. Daubeny. And, he fell asleep ; and when he awoke, he was suffering pain in his left arm — not the old dull grinding pain, but sharper ; which gradually grew less as he lay and watched the weirs at Caster-ton. They had removed the splinters of bone from his arm.

He did not talk much in this happy quiet time. William and Lady Ascot were with him all day. William, dear fellow, used to sit on a footstool, between his sofa and the window, and read the *Times* to him. William's education was imperfect, and he read very badly. He would read Mr. Russell's correspondence till he saw Charles's eye grow bright, and hear his breath quicken, and then he would turn to the list of bankrupts. If this was too sad, he would go on to the share list, and pound away at that, till Charles went to sleep, which he generally did pretty quickly.

About this time — that is to say, well in the spring — Charles asked two questions : — The first was, whether or no he might have the window open ; the next, whether Lord Hainault would lend him an opera-glass ?

Both were answered in the affirmative. The window was opened, and Lord Hainault and William came in, bearing, not an opera-glass, but a great brass telescope, on a stand — a thing with an eight-inch object-glass, which had belonged to old Lord Hainault, who was a Cambridge man, and given to such vanities.

This was very delightful. He could turn it with a move of his hand on to any part of the weirs, and see almost every snail which crawled on the burdocks. The very

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first day he saw one of the men from the paper-mill come to the fourth weir, and pull up the paddles to ease the water. The man looked stealthily round, and then raised a wheel from below the apron, full of spawning perch. And this was close time ! Oho !

Then, a few days after, came a tall, grey-headed gentleman, spinning a bleak for trout, who had with him a lad in top-boots, with a landing-net. And this gentleman sent his bait flying out here and there across the water, and rattled his line rapidly into the palm of his hand in a ball, like a consummate master, as he was. (King among fishermen, prince among gentlemen, you will read these lines, and you will be so good as to understand that I am talking of you.) And this gentleman spun all day and caught nothing.

But he came the next day to the same place, and spun again. The great full south-westerly wind was roaring up the valley, singing among the budding trees, and carrying the dark, low, rainless clouds swiftly before it. At two, just as Lady Ascot and William had gone to lunch, and after Charles had taken his soup and a glass of wine, he, lying there, and watching this gentleman diligently, saw his rod bend, and his line tighten. The lad in the top-boots and the landing-net leaped up from where he lay ; there was no doubt about it now. The old gentleman had got hold of a fish, and a big one.

The next twenty minutes were terrible. The old gentleman gave him the but, and moved slowly down along the camp-shuting, and Charles followed him with the telescope, although his hand was shaking with excitement. After a time, the old gentleman began to wind up his reel, and then the lad, top-boots, and landing-net, and all, slipped over the camp-shooting (will anybody tell me how to spell that word? *Camps-heading* won't do, my dear sir, all things considered) and lifted the fish (he was nine pound), up among the burdocks at the old gentleman's feet.

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Charles had the whole group in the telescope — the old gentleman, the great trout, and the dripping lad, taking off his boots and emptying the water out of them. But the old gentleman was looking to his right at somebody who was coming, and immediately there came into the field of the telescope a tall man in a velvet coat, with knee breeches and gaiters, and directly afterwards, from the other side, three children, and a young lady. The gentleman in the knee breeches bowed to the young lady, and then they all stood looking at the trout.

Charles could see them quite plainly. The gentleman in velveteen and small-clothes was Lord Ascot, and the young lady was Mary.

He did not look through the telescope any more ; he lay back, and tried to think. Presently afterwards old Lady Ascot came in, and settled herself in the window, with her knitting.

"My dear," she said, "I wonder if I fidget you with my knitting-needles? Tell me if I do, for I have plenty of other work."

"Not at all, dear aunt ; I like it. You did nineteen rows this morning, and you would have done twenty-two if you had not dropped a stitch. When I get stronger I shall take to it myself. There would be too much excitement and over exertion in it, for me to begin just now."

Lady Ascot laughed ; she was glad to see him trying even such a feeble joke. She said —

"My dear, Mr. Jackson has killed a trout in the weirs just now, nine pounds."

"I know," said Charles ; "I did not know the weight, but I saw the fish. Aunt, where is Welter — I mean, Ascot?"

"Well, he is at Ranford. I suppose you know, my dear boy, that poor James left him nearly all his fortune. Nearly five hundred thousand pounds' worth, with Cottingdean and Marksworth together. All the Ranford mortgages are paid off, and he is going on very well, my dear. I think they ought to give him his marquisate. James might

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have had it ten times over of course, but he used to say, that he had made himself the most notorious viscount in England, and that if he took an earldom, people would forget who he was."

"I wish he would come to see me, aunt. I am very fond of Welter."

I can't help it; he said so. Remember how near death's door he had been. Think what he had been through. How he had been degraded, and kicked about from pillar to post, like an old shoe, and also remember the state he was in when he said it. I firmly believe that he had at this time forgotten everything, and that he only remembered Lord Ascot as his old boy love, and his jolly college companion. You must make the best of it, or the worst of it for him, as you are inclined. He said so. And in a very short time Lady Ascot found that she wanted some more wool, and hobbled away to get it.

After a time, Charles heard a man come into the room. He thought it was William; but it was not. This man came round the end of the sofa, and stood in the window before him. Lord Ascot.

He was dressed as we know, having looked through Charles's telescope, in a velveteen coat, with knee breeches and leathern gaiters. There was not much change in him since the old times, only his broad, hairless face seemed redder, his lower jaw seemed coarser and more prominent, his great eyebrows seemed more lowering, his vast chest seemed broader and deeper, and altogether he looked rather more like a mighty, coarse, turbulent blackguard than ever.

"Well, old cock," he said, "so you are on your back, hey?"

"Welter," said Charles, "I am so glad to see you again. If you would help me up, I should like to look at you."

"Poor old boy," said Lord Ascot, putting his great arm round him, and raising him, "So! there you are, my pip-pin. What a good old fellow you are, by Gad! So you

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were one of the immortal six hundred, hey? I thought you would turn up somewhere in Queer Street, with that infernal old hook nose of yours. I wish I had taken to that sort of thing, for I am fond of fighting. I think, now I am rich and respectable, I shall subsidize a prize-fighter to pitch into me once a fortnight. I wish I had been respectable enough for the army; but I should always have been in trouble with the commander-in-chief for dicing and brawling, I suppose. Well, old man, I am devilish glad to see you again. I am in possession of money which should have been yours. I did all I could for you, Charles; you will never know how much. I tried to repair the awful wrong I did you unconsciously. I did a thing in your favour I tremble to think of now, but which, God help me, I would do again. You don't know what I mean. If old Saltire had not died so quick, you would have known."

He was referring to his having told Lord Saltire that he had seen Charles. In doing that, remember he had thought that he was throwing half a million to the winds. I only tell you that he was referring to this, for fear you should not gather it from his own brutal way of speaking.

I wonder how the balance will stand against Lord Ascot at last? Who ever could have dreamt that his strong animal affection for his old friend could have led him to make a sacrifice which many a more highly organized man would have evaded, glossing over his conscience by fifty mental subterfuges?

"However, my dear fellow," he continued, "it comes to this: I have got the money; I shall have no children; and I shall make no will; therefore it all comes to you, if you outlive me. About the title I can't say. The lawyers must decide about that. No one seems to know whether or not it descends through the female branch. By-the-by, you are not master of Ravenshoe yet, though there seems no doubt that grandma is right, and that the marriage took place. However, whether the estate goes to you, or to Will-

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iam, I offer the same advice to both of you : if you get my money, don't spend it in getting the title. You can get into the House of Commons easy enough, if you seem to care about that sort of fun ; and fellows I know, tell me that you get much better amusement there for your money than in the other place. I have never been to the House of Lords since the night I took my seat. It struck me as being slow. The fellows say that there is never any chaff, or personalities, or calling to order, or that sort of thing there, which seem to me to be half the fun of the fair. But, of course, you know more about this than I."

Charles, in a minute, when he had ineffectually tried to understand what Lord Ascot had been saying, collected his senses sufficiently to say :

"Welter, old boy, look here, for I am very stupid. Why did you say that you should have no children?"

"Of course I can't ; have they told you nothing?"

"Is Adelaide dead, Welter?" asked Charles, plucking at the buttons of his coat nervously.

"They ought to have told you, Charles," said Lord Ascot, turning to the window. "Now tell me something. Have you any love left for her yet?"

"Not one spark," said Charles, still buttoning and unbuttoning his coat. "If I ever am a man again, I shall ask Mary Corby to marry me. I ought to have done so sooner, perhaps. But I love your wife, Welter, in a way ; and I should grieve at her death, for I loved her once. By Gad ! yes ; you know it. When did she die?"

"She is not dead, Charles."

"Now, don't keep me like this, old man ; I can't stand it. She is no more to me than my sister — not so much. Tell me what is the matter at once ; it can't be worse than what I think."

"The truth is very horrible, Charles," said Lord Ascot, speaking slowly. "She took a fancy that I should buy back her favourite old Irish mare, 'Molly Asthore,' and I bought it for her ; and we went out hunting together, and

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we were making a nick, and I was getting the gate open for her, when the devil rushed it; and down they came on it, together. And she broke her back — Oh, God! oh, God! — and the doctor says she may live till seventy, but that she will never move from where she lies — and just as I was getting to love her so dearly — ”

Charles said nothing; for with such a great, brutal blackguard as Lord Ascot, sobbing passionately at the window, it was as well to say nothing; but he thought, “ Here’s work to the fore, I fancy, after a life of laziness. I have been the object of all these dear souls’ anxiety for a long time. She must take my place now.

Chapter XXVII

In which Gus cuts Flora’s Doll’s Corns

THAT afternoon Charles said nothing more, but lay and looked out of the window at the rhododendrons just bursting into bloom, at the deer, at the rabbits, at the pheasants; and beyond, where the park dipped down so suddenly, at the river which spouted and foamed away as of old; and to the right at the good old town of Casterton, and at the blue smoke from its chimneys, drifting rapidly away before the soft south-westerly wind; and he lay and looked at these and thought.

And before sundown an arch arose in the west which grew and spread; an arch of pale green sky, which grew till it met the sun, and then the wet grass in the park shone out all golden, and the topmost cedar boughs began to blaze like burnished copper.

And then he spoke. He said, “ William, my dear old friend — loved more deeply than any words can tell — come here, for I have something to say to you.”

And good William came and stood beside him. And William looked at him and saw that his face was animated,

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and that his eyes were sparkling. And he stood and said not a word, but smiled and waited for him to go on.

And Charles said, "Old boy, I have been looking through that glass to-day, and I saw Mr. Jackson catch the trout, and I saw Welter, and I saw Mary, and I want you to go and fetch Mary here."

And William straightway departed; and as he went up the staircase he met the butler, and he looked so happy, so radiant, and so thoroughly kind-hearted and merry, that the butler, a solemn man, found himself smiling as he drew politely aside to let him pass.

I hope you like this fellow, William. He was, in reality, only a groom, say you. Well, that is true enough. A fellow without education or breeding, though highly born. But still, I hope you like him. I was forgetting myself a little though. At this time he is master of Ravenshoe, with certainly nine, and probably twelve, thousand a year — a most eminently respectable person. One year's income of his would satisfy a man I know, very well, and yet I am talking of him apologetically. But then we novel writers have an unlimited command of money, if we could only realize it.

However, this great capitalist went up stairs towards the nursery; and here I must break off, if you please, and take up the thread of my narrative in another place (I don't mean the House of Lords).

In point of fact, there had been a shindy (I use the word advisedly, and will repeat it) — a shindy, in the nursery that evening. The duty of a story-teller is to stick in a moral reflection wherever he can, and so at this place I pitchfork in this caution to young governesses, that nothing can be more incautious or reprehensible, than to give children books to keep them quiet without first seeing what these books are about.

Mary was very much to blame in this case (you see I tell the truth, and spare nobody). Gus, Flora, and Archy had been out to walk with her, as we know, and had come

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home in a very turbulent state of mind. They had demanded books as the sole condition on which they would be good ; and Mary being in a fidget about her meeting with Lord Ascot, over the trout, and being not quite herself, had promptly supplied Gus with a number of *Blackwood's Magazine*, and Flora with a "Shakspeare."

This happened early in the afternoon. Remember this ; for if we are not particular in our chronology, we are naught.

Gus turned to the advertisements. He read among other things a testimonial to a great corn-cutter, from a potentate who keeps a very small army, and don't mean any harm : —

" (TRANSLATION).

" Professor Homberg has cut my corns with a dexterity truly marvellous.

(Signed) " NAPOLEON."

From a country baronet : —

" I am satisfied with Professor Homberg.

(Signed) " PITCHCROFT COCKPOLE, Bart."

From a bishop in the South Sea Islands : —

" Professor Homberg has cut my corns in a manner which does equal honour to his head and his heart.

(Signed) " RANGEHAIETA."

(His real name is Jones, but that is neither here nor there) ; and in the mean time Flora had been studying a certain part of " King Lear."

Later in the afternoon it occurred to Gus, that he would like to be a corn-cutter and have testimonials. He proposed to cut nurse's corns, but she declined, assigning reasons. Failing here, he determined to cut Flora's doll's

Gus cuts Flora's Doll's Corns

corns, and, with this view, possessed himself of her person during Flora's temporary absence.

He began by snicking the corner of her foot off with nurse's scissors. Then he found that the sawdust dribbled out at the orifice. This was very delightful. He shook her and it dribbled faster. Then he cut the other foot off and shook her again. And she, not having any stitches put in about the knee (as all dolls should), lost, not only the sawdust from her legs, but also from her stomach and body, leaving nothing but collapsed calico and a bust, with an undisturbed countenance of wax above all.

At this time Flora had rushed in to the rescue ; she felt the doll's body and she saw the heap of sawdust ; whereupon she, remembering her " King Lear," turned on him and said scornfully :

" Nero is an angler in the lake of darkness." At this awful taunt, Gus butted her in the stomach, and she got hold of him by the hair. Archy, excited for the first time in his life, threw a box of ninepins at them, which exploded. Mary rushed in to separate them, and at the same moment in came William with a radiant face, and he quietly took Mary round the waist (like his impudence), and he said, " My dear creature, go down to Charles, and leave these Turks to me."

And she left these Turks to him. And he sat on a chair and administered justice ; and in a very few minutes, under the influence of that kind, happy, sunny face of his, Flora had kissed Gus, and Archy had cuddled up on his knee, and was sucking his thumb in peace.

And going down to the hall, he found Lady Ascot hobbling up and down, taking her afternoon's exercise, and she said to him, " Ravenshoe, you best and kindest of souls, she is there with him now. My dear, we had better not move in this matter any more. I tried to dispossess you before I knew your worth and goodness, but I will do nothing now. He is rich, and perhaps it is better,

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my dear, that Ravenshoe should be in Papist hands — at least, in such hands as yours."

He said, "My dear madam, I am not Ravenshoe. I feel sure that you are right. We must find Ellen."

And Mary came out and came toward them; and she said, "Lady Ascot and Mr. Ravenshoe, Charles and I are engaged to be married."

Chapter XXVIII

The Allied Armies advance on Ravenshoe

How near the end we are getting, and yet so much to come. Never mind. We will tell it all naturally and straightforwardly, and then there will be nothing to offend you.

By-and-by it became necessary that Charles should have air and exercise. His arm was well. Every splinter had been taken out of it, and he must lie on the sofa no longer.

So he was driven out through pleasant places, through the budding spring, in one of Lord Hainault's carriages. All the meadows had been bush-harrowed and rolled long ago, and now the orchises and fritillaries were beginning to make the grass look purple. Lady Hainault had a low carriage, and a pair of small cobs, and this was given up to Charles; and Lady Hainault's first coachman declined to drive her ladyship out in the day-time, for fear that the second coachman (a meritorious young man of forty) should frighten Charles by a reckless and inexperienced way of driving.

Consequently Lady Hainault went a buying flannel petticoats and that sort of thing, for the poor people in Casterton and Henley, driven by her second coachman; and Charles was trundled all over the country by the first coachman, in a low carriage with the pair of cobs. But

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Lady Hainault was as well pleased with the arrangement as the old coachman himself, and so it is no business of ours. For the curious thing was, that no one who ever knew Charles, would have hesitated for an instant in giving up to him, his or her, bed, or dinner, or carriage, or any other thing in this world. For people are great fools, you know.

Perhaps the reason of it was that every one who made Charles's acquaintance, knew by instinct that he would have cut off his right hand to serve them. I don't know why it was. But there is the fact.

Sometimes Lady Ascot would go with him, and sometimes William. And one day, when William was with him, they were bowling quietly along a by-road on the opposite side of the water from Hurley. And in a secret place, they came on a wicked old gentleman, breaking the laws of his country, and catching perch in close time, out of a punt, with a chair, and a stone bottle, and a fisherman from Maidenhead, who shall be nameless, but who must consider himself cautioned.

The Rajah of Ahmednuggur lives close by there; and he was reading the *Times*, when Charles asked the coachman to pull up, that he might see the sport. The Rajah's attention was caught by seeing the carriage stop; and he looked through a double-barrelled opera glass, and not only saw Charles and William in the carriage, but saw, through the osiers, the hoary old profligate with his pater-noster pulling the perch out as fast as he could put his line in. Fired by a virtuous indignation (I wish every gentleman on the Thames would do likewise), he ran in his breeches and slippers down the lawn, and began blowing up like Old Gooseberry.

The old gentleman who was fishing looked at the rajah's red-brick house, and said, "If my face was as ugly as that house, I would wear a green veil;" but he ordered the fisherman to take up the rypecks, and he floated away down stream.

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And as Charles and William drove along, Charles said, "My dear boy, there could not be any harm in catching a few roach. I should so like to go about among pleasant places in a punt once more."

When they got home, the head keeper was sent for. Charles told him that he would so much like to go fishing, and that a few roach would not make much difference. The keeper scornfully declined arguing about the matter, but only wanted to know what time Mr. Ravenshoe would like to go, adding that any one who made objections would be brought up uncommon short.

So William and he went fishing in a punt, and one day Charles said, "I don't care about this punt-fishing much. I wish — I wish I could get back to the trout at Ravenshoe."

"Do you really mean that?" said William.

"Ah, Willy!" said Charles. "If I could only see it again!"

"How I have been waiting to hear you say that!" said William. "Come to your home with me; why, the people are wondering where we are. My darling bird will be jealous, if I stay here much longer. Come down to my wedding."

"When are you to be married, William?"

"On the same day as yourself," said William sturdily.

Said Charles, "Put the punt ashore, will you?" And they did. And Charles, with his nose in the air, and his chest out, walked beside William across the spring meadows, through the lengthening grass, through the calthas, and the orchises, and the ladies' slippers, and the cowslips, and the fritillaries, through the budding flower garden which one finds in spring among the English meadows, a hale strong man. And when they had clomb the precipitous slope of the deer-park, Charles picked a rhododendron flower, and put it in his button-hole, and turned round to William, with the flush of health on his face, and said —

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"Brother, we will go to Ravenshoe, and you will be with your love. Shall we be married in London?"

"In St. Petersburg, if you like, now I see you looking your old self again. But why?"

"A fancy of mine. When I remember what I went through in London through my own obstinacy, I should like to take my revenge on the place, by spending the happiest day of my life there. Do you agree?"

"Of course."

"Ask Lady Ascot and Mary and the children down to Ravenshoe. Lady Hainault will come too, but he can't. And have General Mainwaring and the Tiernays. Have as many of the old circle as we can get."

"This is something like life again," said William. "Remember, Charles, I am not spending the revenues of Ravenshoe. They are yours. I know it. I am spending about 400*l.* a year. When our grandfather's marriage is proved, you will provide for me and my wife, I know that. Be quiet. But we shall never prove that till we find Ellen."

"Find Ellen!" exclaimed Charles, turning round. "I will not go near Ellen yet."

"Do you know where she is?" asked William, eagerly.

"Of course I do," said Charles. "She is at Hackney. Hornby told me so when he was dying. But let her be for a time."

"I tell you," said William, "that I am sure that she knows everything. At Hackney!"

The allied powers, General Mainwaring, Lady Ascot, Lord Hainault, and William, were not long before they searched every hole and corner of Hackney, in and out. There was only one nunnery there, but, in that nunnery, there was no young lady at all resembling Ellen. The priests, particularly Father Mackworth's friend Butler, gave them every assistance in their power. But it was no good.

As Charles and William were in the railway carriage going westward, Charles said —

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"Well, we have failed to find Ellen. Mackworth, poor fellow, is still at Ravenshoe."

"Yes," said William, "and nearly idiotic. All his fine-spun cobwebs cast to the winds. But he holds the clue to this mystery, or I am mistaken. The younger Tiernay takes care of him. He probably won't know you. But Charles, when you come into Ravenshoe, keep a corner for Mackworth."

"He ought to be an honoured guest of the house as long as he lives," said Charles. "You still persist in saying that Ravenshoe is mine."

"I am sure it is," said William.

And, at this same time, William wrote to two other people telling all about the state of affairs, and asking them to come and join the circle. And John Marston came across into my room and said, "Let us go." And I said, "My dear John, we ought to go. It is not every day that we see a man, and such a man, risen from the dead, as Charles Ravenshoe."

And so we went.

Chapter XXIX

Father Mackworth puts the Finishing Touch on his Great Piece of Embroidery

AND so we went. At Ravenshoe were assembled General Mainwaring, Lady Ascot, Mary, Gus, Flora, Archy, and nurse, William, Charles, Father Tiernay and Father Murtagh Tiernay, John Marston, and Tommy Cruse from Clovelly, a little fisherboy, cousin of Jane Evans's — Jane Evans who was to be Mrs. Ravenshoe.

It became necessary that Jane Evans should be presented to Lady Ascot. She was only a fisherman's daughter, but she was wonderfully beautiful, and gentle, and good. William brought her into the hall one evening, when every

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one was sitting round the fire ; and he said, " My dear madam, this is my wife that is to be." Nothing more.

And the dear old woman rose and kissed her, and said, " My love, how wonderfully pretty you are. You must learn to love me, you know, and you must make haste about it, because I am a very old woman, and I sha'n't live very long."

So Jane sat down by Mary, and was at home, though a little nervous. And General Mainwaring came and sat beside her, and made himself as agreeable as very few men beside him know how to. And the fisherboy got next to William, and stared about with his great black eyes, like a deer in a flower-garden. (You caught that face capitally, Mr. Hook, if you will allow me to say so — best painter of the day !)

Jane Evans was an immense success. She had been to school six months at Exeter, and had possibly been drilled in a few little matters : such as how to ask a gentleman to hold her fan ; how to sit down to the piano when asked to sing (which she couldn't do) ; how to marshal her company to dinner ; how to step into the car of a balloon ; and so on. Things absolutely necessary to know, of course, but which had nothing to do with her success in this case ; for she was so beautiful, gentle, and winning, that she might have done anything short of eating with her knife, and would have been considered nice.

Had she a slight Devonshire accent ? Well, well ! Do you know, I rather like it. I consider it equally so good with the Scotch, my dear.

I could linger and linger on about this pleasant spring at old Ravenshoe, but I must not. You have been my companion so long that I am right loth to part with you. But the end is very near.

Charles had his revenge upon the trout. The first day after he had recovered from his journey, he and William went out and did most terrible things. William would not carry a rod, but gave his to the servant, and took the land-

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ing-net. That Ravenshoe stream carries the heaviest fish in Devonshire. Charles worked up to the waterfall, and got nineteen, weighing fourteen pounds. Then they walked down to the weir above the bridge, and then Charles's evil genius prompted him to say, "William, have you got a salmon fly in your book?" And William told him that he had, but solemnly warned him of what would happen.

Charles was reckless and foolish. He, with a twelve foot trout rod, and thirty yards of line, threw a small salmon fly under the weir above the bridge. There was a flash on the water. Charles's poor little reel began screaming, and the next moment the line came "flick" home across his face, and he said, "By gosh, what a fool I was," and then he looked up to the bridge, and there was Father Mackworth looking at him.

"How d'ye do, my dear sir?" said Charles. "Glad to see you out. I have been trying to kill a salmon with trout tackle, and have done quite the other thing."

Father Mackworth looked at him, but did not speak a word. Then he looked round, and young Murtagh Tiernay came up and led him away; and Charles got up on the road and watched the pair going home. And as he saw the tall narrow figure of Father Mackworth creeping slowly along, dragging his heels as he went, he said, "Poor old fellow, I hope he will live to forgive me."

Father Mackworth, poor fellow, dragged his heels homeward; and when he got into his room in the priests' tower, Murtagh Tiernay said to him, "My dear friend, you are not angry with me? I did not tell you that he was come back, I thought it would agitate you."

And Father Mackworth said slowly, for all his old decisive utterance was gone, "The Virgin bless you, you are a good man."

And Father Mackworth spoke truth. Both the Tiernays were good fellows, though papists.

"Let me help you off with your coat," said Murtagh, for Mackworth was standing in deep thought.

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"Thank you," said Mackworth. "Now, while I sit here, go and fetch your brother."

Murtagh Tiernay did as he was told. In a few minutes our good jolly old Irish friend was leaning over Mackworth's chair.

"Ye're not angry that we didn't tell ye there was company?" he said.

"No, no," said Mackworth. "Don't speak to me, that's a good man. Don't confuse me. I am going. You had better send Murtagh out of the room."

Father Murtagh disappeared.

"I am going," said Mackworth. "Tiernay, we were not always good friends, were we?"

"We are good friends, any way now, brother," said Tiernay.

"Ay, ay, you are a good man. I have done a wrong. I did it for the sake of the Church, partly, and partly — well. I was very fond of Cuthbert. I loved that boy, Tiernay. And I spun a web. But it has all got confused. It is on this left side, which feels so heavy. They shouldn't make one's brain in two halves, should they?"

"Begorra no. It's a burnin' shame," said Father Tiernay, determining, like a true Irishman, to agree with every word said, and find out what was coming.

"That being the case, my dear friend," said poor Mackworth, "give me the portfolio and ink, and we will let our dear brother Butler know, *de profundis clamavi*, that the time is come."

Father Tiernay said, "That will be the proper course," and got him pen and ink, fully assured that another fit was coming on, and that he was wandering in his mind; but still watching to see whether he would let out anything. A true Irishman.

Mackworth let out nothing. He wrote as steadily as he could, a letter of two lines, and put it in an envelope. Then he wrote another letter of about three lines, and inclosed the whole in a larger envelope, and closed it. Then

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he said to Father Tiernay, "Direct it to Butler, will you, my dear friend ; you quite agree that I have done right ? "

Father Tiernay said that he had done quite right ; but wondered what the dickens it was all about. We soon found out. But we walked, and rode, and fished, and chatted, and played billiards, and got up charades with Lady Ascot for an audience ; not often thinking of the poor paralytic priest in the lonely tower, and little dreaming of the mine which he was going to spring under our feet.

The rows (there is no other expression) that used to go on between Father Tiernay and Lady Ascot were as amusing as anything I ever heard. I must do Tiernay the justice to say that he was always perfectly well bred, and also, that Lady Ascot began it. Her good temper, her humour, and her shrewdness were like herself ; I can say no more. Tiernay dodged, and shuffled, and went from pillar to post, and was as witty and good-humoured as an Irishman can be ; but I, as a staunch Protestant, am of opinion that Lady Ascot, though nearly ninety, had the best of it. I daresay good Father Tiernay don't agree with me.

The younger Tiernay was always in close attendance on Mackworth. Every one got very fond of this young priest. We used to wait until Father Mackworth was reported to be in bed, and then he was sent for. And generally we used to make an excuse to go into the chapel, and Lady Ascot would come, defiant of rheumatism, and we would get him to the organ.

And then — Oh, Lord ! how he would make that organ speak, and plead, and pray, till the prayer was won. And then, how he would send aggregated armies of notes, marching in vast battalions one after another, out into space, to die in confused melody ; and then, how he would sound the trumpet to recall them, and get no answer but the echo of the roof. Ah ! well. I hope you are fond of music, reader.

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But one night we sent for him, and he could not come. And later we sent again, but he did not come; and the man we had sent, being asked, looked uneasy, and said he did not know why. By this time the ladies had gone to bed. General Mainwaring, Charles, William, John Marston, and myself, were sitting over the fire in the hall, smoking, and little Tommy Cruse was standing between William's knees.

The candles and the fire were low. There was light outside from a clouded moon, so that one could see the gleam of the sea out of the mullioned windows. Charles was stooping down, describing the battle of the Alma on the hearthrug, and William was bending over, watching him, holding the boy between his knees, as I said. General Mainwaring was puffing his cigar, and saying, "Yes, yes; that's right enough;" and Marston and I were, like William, looking at Charles.

Suddenly the boy gave a loud cry, and hid his face in William's bosom. I thought he had been taken with a fit. I looked up over General Mainwaring's head, and I cried out, "My God! what is this?"

We were all on our legs in a moment, looking the same way. At the long low mullioned window which had been behind General Mainwaring. The clouded moonlight outside showed us the shape of it. But between us and it there stood three black figures, and as we looked at them, we drew one towards the other, for we were frightened. The general took two steps forward.

One of the figures advanced noiselessly. It was dressed in black, and its face was shrouded in a black hood. In that light, with that silent even way of approaching, it was the most awful figure I ever saw. And from under its hood came a woman's voice, the sound of which made the blood of more than one to stand still, and then go madly on again. It said:—

"I am Ellen Ravenshoe. My sins and my repentance are known to some here. I have been to the war, in the

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hospitals, till my health gave way, and I came home but yesterday, as it were, and I have been summoned here. Charles, I was beautiful once. Look at this."

And she threw her hood back, and we looked at her in the dim light. Beautiful once! Ay, but never so beautiful as now. The complexion was deadly pale, and the features were pinched, but she was more beautiful than ever. I declare I believe that if we had seen a ring of glory round her head at that moment none of us would have been surprised. Just then, her beauty, her nun's dress, and the darkness of the hall, assisted the illusion, probably; but there was really something saintlike and romantic about her, for an instant or so, which made us all stand silent. Alas! there was no ring of glory round her head. Poor Ellen was only bearing the cross, she had not won the crown.

Charles was the first who spoke or moved; he went up to her, and kissed her, and said, "My sweet sister, I knew that if I ever saw you again I should see you in these weeds. My dear love, I am so glad to see you. And oh, my sister, how much more happy to see you dressed like that —"

(Of course he did not use exactly those words, but words to that effect, only more passionate and even less grammatical. I am not a short-hand writer. I only give you the substance of conversations in the best prose I can command.)

"Charles," she said, "I do right to wear weeds, for I am the widow of — (Never mind what she said; that sort of thing very properly jars on Protestant ears.) I am a sister of the Society of Mercy of St. Bridget, and I have been to the East, as I told you: and more than once I must have been into the room where you lay, to borrow things, or talk with English Catholic ladies, and never guessed you were there. After Hornby had found me at Hackney, I got leave from Father Butler to join an Irish sisterhood; for our mother was Irish in speech and in

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heart, you remember, though not by birth. I have something to say — something very important. Father Mackworth, will you come here? Are all here intimate friends of the family? Will you ask any of them to leave the hall, Charles?"

"Not one," said Charles. "Is one of those dark figures which have frightened us so much, Father Mackworth? My dear sir, I am so sorry. Come to the fire; and who is the other?"

"Only Murtagh Tiernay," said a soft voice.

"Why did you stand out there these few minutes? Father Mackworth, your arm."

William and Charles helped him in towards the fire. He looked terribly ill and ghastly. The dear old general took him from them, and sat him down in his own chair by the fire; and there he sat looking curiously around him, with the light of the wood fire and the candles strong on his face, while Ellen stood behind him, with her hood thrown back, and her white hands folded on her bosom. If you have ever seen a stranger group than we were, I should be glad to hear of it.

Poor Mackworth seemed to think that it was expected of him to speak. He looked up to General Mainwaring, and he said —

"I hope you are the better of your wound, sir. I have had a sharp stroke of paralysis, and I have another coming on, sir, and my memory is going. When you meet my Lord Saltire, whom I am surprised to find absent to-night, will you tell him that I presented my compliments, and thought that he had used me very well on the whole? Had she not better begin, sir? or it may be too late; unless you would like to wait for Lord Saltire."

Father Murtagh Tiernay knelt down and whispered to him.

"Ay! ay!" he said, "Dead — ay! so he is, I had forgotten. We shall all be dead soon. Some of us will to hell, General, and some to heaven, and all to purgatory."

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I am a priest, sir. I have been bound body and soul to the Church from a child, and I have done things which the Church will disapprove of when they are told, though not while they are kept secret; and I tell them because the eyes of a dead man, of a man who was drowned bathing in the bay, haunt me day and night, and say, speak out! — Murtagh!"

Little Tiernay was kneeling beside him, and called his attention to him.

"You had better give me the wine; for the end is getting very near. Tell her to begin."

And while poor Mackworth was taking some wine (poor fellow, it was little enough he had taken in his life-time), Ellen began to speak. I had some notion that we should know everything now. We had guessed the truth for a long while. We had guessed everything about Petre Ravenshoe's marriage. We believed in it. We seemed to know all about it, from Lady Ascot. No link was wanting in the chain of proof, save one, the name of the place in which that marriage took place. That had puzzled every one. Lady Ascot declared it was a place in the north of Hampshire, as you will remember, but every register had been searched there, without result. So conceive how we all stared at poor Ellen, when she began to speak, wondering whether she knew as much as ourselves, or even more.

"I am Miss Ravenshoe," she said quietly. "My brother Charles there is heir to this estate; and I have come here to-night to tell you so."

There was nothing new here. We knew all about that. I stood up and put my arm through Charles Ravenshoe's, and William came and laid his hand upon my shoulder. The general stood before the fire, and Ellen went on.

"Petre Ravenshoe was married in 1778 to Maria Dawson, and his son was James Ravenshoe, my father, who was called Horton, and was Densil Ravenshoe's game-keeper. I have proof of this."

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So had we. We knew all this. What did she know more? It was intolerable that she was to stop just here, and leave the one awful point unanswered. I forgot my good manners utterly; I clutched Charles's arm tighter, and I cried out —

"We know about the marriage, Miss Ravenshoe; we have known of it a long while. But where did it take place, my dear young lady? Where?"

She turned on me and answered, wondering at my eagerness. I had brought out the decisive words at last, the words that we had been dying to hear for six months; she said —

"At Finchampstead, in Berkshire; I have a copy of the certificate with me."

I let go of Charles's arm, and fell back in my chair. My connexion with this story is over (except the trouble of telling it, which I beg you won't mention, for it has given me as much pleasure as it has you; and that, if you look at it in a proper point of view, is quite just, for very few men have a friend who has met with such adventures as Charles Ravenshoe, who will tell them all about it afterwards). I fell back in my chair, and stared at poor Father Mackworth as if he were a copper disk, and I was trying to get into a sufficiently idiotic state to be electrobiologized.

"I have very little more to tell," said Ellen. "I was not aware that you knew so much. From Mr. William Marston's agitation, I conclude that I have supplied the only link which was missing. I think that Father Mackworth wishes to explain to you why he sent for me to come here to-night. If he feels himself able to do so now, I shall be glad to be dismissed."

Father Mackworth sat up in his chair, and spoke at once. He had gathered himself up for the effort, and went through it well, though with halting and difficult speech.

"I knew of Petre Ravenshoe's marriage from Father

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Clifford, with all the particulars. It had been confessed to him. He told it to me the day Mrs. Ravenshoe died, after Densil Ravenshoe had told me that his second son was to be brought up to the Protestant faith. I went to him in a furious passion, and he told me about this previous marriage which had been confessed to him, to quiet me. It showed me, that if the worst were to happen, and Cuthbert were to die, and Ravenshoe go to a Protestant, I could still bring in a Catholic as a last resource. For if Cuthbert had died, and Norah had not confessed about the changing of the children, I should have brought in James, and after him William, both Catholics, believing him to be the son of James and Norah. Do you understand ?

"Why did I not? I loved that boy Cuthbert. And it was told under seal of confession, and must not be used save in deadly extremity, and William was a turbulent boy. Which would have been the greater crime at that time? It was only a choice of evils, for the Church is very dear to me.

"Then Norah confessed to me about the change of children, and then I saw, that by speaking of Petre Ravenshoe's marriage, I should only bring in a Protestant heir. But I saw, also, that by using her confession only, I could prove Charles Ravenshoe to be merely a gamekeeper's son, and turn him out into the world, and so I used it, sir. You used to irritate and insult me, sir," he said, turning to Charles, "and I was not so near death then as now. If you can forgive me, in God's name say so."

Charles went over to him, and put his arm round him. "Forgive you?" he said; "dear Mackworth, can you forgive me?"

"Well, well!" he continued, what have I to forgive, Charles? At one time, I thought if I spoke that it would be better, because Ellen, the only daughter of the house, would have had a great dower, as Ravenshoe girls have. But I loved Cuthbert too well. And Lord Welter stopped

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my even thinking of doing so, by coming to Ravenshoe. And — and — we are all gentlemen here. The day that you hunted the black hare, I had been scolding her for writing to him. And William and I made her mad between us, and she ran away to him. And she is with the army now, Charles. I should not fetch her back, Charles. She is doing very good work there."

By this time she had drawn the black hood over her face, and was standing behind him, motionless.

"I will answer any more questions you like to-morrow. Petre Ravenshoe's marriage took place at Finchampstead, remember. Charles, my dear boy, would you mind kissing me? I think I always loved you, Charles. Murtagh Tiernay, take me to my room."

And so he went tottering away through the darkness. Charles opened the door for him. Ellen stood with her hood over her face, motionless.

"I can speak like this with my face hidden," she said. "It is easy for one who has been through what I have, to speak. What I have been you know, what I am now is — (she used one of those Roman Catholic forms of expression, which are best not repeated too often.) I have a little to add to this statement. William was cruel to me. You know you were. You were wrong. I will not go on. You were awfully unjust — you were horribly unjust. The man who has just left the room had some slight right to upbraid me. You had none. You were utterly wrong. Mackworth, in one way, is a very high-minded honourable man. You made me hate you, William. God forgive me. I have forgiven you now."

"Yes; I was wrong," said William, "I was wrong. But Ellen, Ellen! before old friends, only with regard to the person."

"When you treated me so ill, I was as innocent as your mother, sir. Let us go on. This man Mackworth knew more than you. We had some terrible scenes together about Lord Welter. One day he lost his temper, and be-

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came theatrical. He opened his desk and showed me a bundle of papers, which he waved in the air, and said that they contained my future destiny. The next day, I went to the carpenter's shop and took a chisel. I broke open his desk, and possessed myself of them. I found the certificate of Petre Ravenshoe's marriage. I knew that you, William, as I thought, and I were the elder children. But I loved Cuthbert and Charles better than you or myself, and I would not speak. When, afterwards, Father Butler told me, while I was with Lord Welter, before I joined the sisters, of the astounding fact of the change of children, I still held my peace, because I thought Charles would be the better of penance for a year or so, and because I hesitated to throw the power of a house like this into heretic hands, though it were into the hands of my own brother. Mackworth and Butler were to some extent enemies, I think; for Butler seems not to have told Mackworth that I was with him for some time, and I hardly know how he found it out at last. Three days ago I received this letter from Mackworth, and after some hesitation I came. For I thought that the Church could not be helped by wrong, and I wanted to see that he concealed nothing. Here it is. I shall say no more."

And she departed, and I have not seen her since. Perhaps she is best where she is. I got a sight of the letter from Father Mackworth. It ran thus —

"Come here at once, I order you. I am going to tell the truth. Charles has come back. I will not bear the responsibility any longer."

Poor Mackworth! He went back to his room, attended by the kind-hearted young priest, who had left his beloved organ at Segur, to come and attend to him. Lord Segur pished and pshawed, and did something more, which we won't talk about, for which he had to get absolution. But Murtagh Tiernay stayed at Ravenshoe, defying his lordship, and his lordship's profane oaths, and making the Ravenshoe organ talk to Father Mackworth

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about quiet churchyards and silent cloisters ; and sometimes raging on until the poor paralytic priest began to see the great gates rolled back, and the street of the everlasting city beyond, crowded with glorious angels. Let us leave these two to their music. Before we went to town for the wedding, we were sitting one night, and playing at loo, in the hall. (Not guinea unlimited loo, as they used to play at Lord Welter's, but penny loo, limited to eighteen pence.) General Mainwaring had been looted in miss four times running, making six shillings (an almost impossible circumstance, but true), and Lady Ascot had been laughing at him so, that she had to take off her spectacles and wipe them, when Murtagh Tiernay came into the hall, and took away Charles, and his brother Father Tiernay.

The game was dropped soon after this. At Ravenshoe there was an old-fashioned custom of having a great supper brought into the hall at ten. A silly old custom, seeing that every one had dined at seven. Supper was brought in, and every one sat down to table. All sorts of things were handed to one by the servants, but no one ate anything. No one ever did. But the head of the table was empty, Charles was absent.

After supper was cleared away, every one drew in a great circle round the fire, in the charming old-fashioned way one sees very seldom now, for a talk before we went to bed. But nobody talked much. Only Lady Ascot said, "I shall not go upstairs till he comes back. General, you may smoke your cigar, but here I sit."

General Mainwaring would not smoke his cigar, even up the chimney. Almost before he had time to say so, Charles and Father Tiernay came into the room without saying a word, and Charles, passing through the circle, pushed the logs on the hearth together with his foot.

"Charles," said Lady Ascot, "has anything happened?"

"Yes, aunt."

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"Is he dead?"

"Yes, aunt."

"I thought so," said Lady Ascot, "I hope he has forgiven me any hard thoughts I had of him. I could have been brought to love that man in time. There were a great many worse men than he, sir," she added in her old clear ringing tones, turning to Father Tiernay. "There were a great many worse men than he."

"There were a great many worse men, Lady Ascot," said Father Tiernay. "There have been many worse men with better opportunities. He was a good man brought up in a bad school. A good man spoilt. General Mainwaring, you who are probably more honoured than any man in England just now, and are worthy of it; you who can't stop at a street corner without a crowd getting together to hurrah to you; you, the very darling of the nation, are going to Oxford to be made an honorary Doctor of Laws. And when you go into that theatre, and hear the maddening music of those boys' voices cheering you: then, general, don't get insane with pride like Herod, but think what you might have been with Mackworth's opportunities."

I think we all respected the Irishman for speaking up for his friend, although his speech might be extravagant. But I am sure that no one respected him more sincerely than our valiant, humble, old friend, General Mainwaring.

Chapter XXX

Gus and Flora are Naughty in Church, and the Whole Business comes to an End

CHARLES'S purpose of being married in London held good. And I need not say that William's held good too.

Shall I insult your judgment by telling you that the whole story of Petre Ravenshoe's marriage at Finchamp-

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stead was true? I think not. The register was found, the lawyers were busy down at Ravenshoe, for every one was anxious to get up to London, and have the two marriages over before the season was too far advanced.

The memorabilia about this time at Ravenshoe, were — The weather was glorious. (I am not going to give you any more about the two capes, and that sort of thing. You have had those two capes often enough. And I am reserving my twenty-ninth description of the Ravenshoe scenery for the concluding chapter.) The weather, I say, was glorious. And I was always being fetched in from the river, smelling fishy, and being made to witness deeds. I got tired of writing my name. I may have signed away the amount of the national debt in triplicate, for anything I know (or care. For you can't get blood out of a stone). I signed some fifty of them, I think. But I signed two, which gave me great pleasure.

The first was a rent-charge on Ravenshoe of two thousand a year, in favour of William Ravenshoe. The second was a similar deed of five hundred a year in favour of Miss Ravenshoe. We will now have done with all this sordid business, and go on.

The ladies had all left for town, to prepare for the ceremony. There was a bachelor's house at Ravenshoe for the last time. The weather was hot. Charles Ravenshoe, General Mainwaring, and the rest, were all looking out of the dining-room windows towards the sea, when we were astonished by seeing two people ride up on to the terrace, and stop before the porch.

A noble-looking old gentleman, in a blue coat and brass buttons, knee-breeches and gaiters, on a cob, and a beautiful boy of sixteen on a horse. I knew well enough who it was, and I said Ho! But the others wondered. William would have known, had he been looking out of window just then, but by the time he got there, the old gentleman and the boy were in the porch, and two of Charles's men were walking the horses up and down.

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"Now, who the deuce is this?" said Charles. "They haven't come far; but I don't know them. I seem to know the old man, somehow; but I can't remember."

We heard the old gentleman's heavy step along the hall, and then the door was thrown open, and the butler announced, like a true Devonshire man —

"Mr. Humby to Hele!"

The old gentleman advanced with a frank smile and took Charles's hand, and said, "Welcome home, sir; welcome to your own; welcome to Ravenshoe. A Protestant at Ravenshoe at last. After so many centuries."

Everybody had grown limp and faint when they heard the awful name of Humby, that is to say, every one but me. Of course I had nothing to do with fetching him over. Not at all. This was the first time that a Humby had had friendly communication with a Ravenshoe, for seven hundred and eighty-nine years. The two families had quarrelled in 1066, in consequence of John Humby having pushed against Kempion Ravenshoe, in the grand rush across the Senlac, at the battle of Hastings. Kempion Ravenshoe had asked John Humby where he was shoving to, and John Humby had expressed a wish to punch Kempion Ravenshoe's head (or do what went for the same thing in those times. I am no antiquarian). The wound was never healed. The two families located themselves on adjoining estates in Devonshire immediately after the conquest, but never spoke till 1529, when Lionel Humby bit his thumb at our old friend, Alured Ravenshoe, in Cardinal Wolsey's antechamber, at Hampton, and Alured Ravenshoe asked him, what the devil he meant by that. They fought in Twickenham meadow, but held no relations for two hundred and fourteen years, that is to say, till 1745, when Ambrose Ravenshoe squeezed an orange at Chichester Humby at an election dinner in Stonnington, and Boddy Fortescue went out as second to Chichester Humby, and Lord Segur to Ambrose Ravenshoe. After this the families did not speak again for one hundred and ten.

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years, that is to say, till the time we are speaking of, the end of April, 1855, when James Humby to Hele frightened us all out of our wits, by coming into the dining-room at Ravenshoe, in a blue coat and brass buttons, and shaking hands with Charles, and saying, beside what I have written above —

“Mrs. Humby and my daughters are in London for the season, and I go to join them the day after to-morrow. There has been a slight cloud between the two houses lately” (that is to say, as we know it, for seven hundred and eighty-nine years. But what is time?) “and I wish to remove it. I am not a very old man, but I have my whimsies, my dear sir. I wish my daughters to appear among Miss Corby’s bridesmaids, and do you know, I fancy when you get to London, that you will find the whole matter arranged.”

Who was to resist this? Old Humby went up in the train with all of us the next day but one. And if I were asked to pick out the most roystering, boisterous, jolly old county member in England, Scotland, or Ireland, I should pick out old Humby of Hele. What fun he made at the stations where the express stopped! The way he allowed himself to be fetched out of the refreshment room by the guard, and then, at the last moment, engaged him in a general conversation about the administration of the line, until the station-master was mad, and an accident imminent, was worthy of a much younger man, to say the least. But then, in a blue coat and brass buttons, with drab small clothes, you may do anything. They are sure to take you for a swell. If I, William Marston, am ever old enough, and fat enough, and rich enough, I shall dress like that myself, for reasons. If my figure does not develop, I shall try black br—ch—s and gaiters, with a shovel hat, and a black silk waistcoat buttoned up under my throat. That very often succeeds. Either are better than pegtops and a black bowler hat, which strike no awe into the beholders.

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When we all got to town, we were, of course, very busy. There was a great deal of millinery business. Old Humby insisted on helping at it. One day he went to Madame Tulle's, in Conduit Street, with his wife and two daughters, and asked me to come too, for which I was sorry at first, for he behaved very badly, and made a great noise. We were in a great suite of rooms on the first floor, full of crinolines and that sort of thing, and there were a great many people present. I was trying to keep him quiet, for he was cutting a good many clumsy jokes, as an old-fashioned country squire will. Everybody was amused with him, and thoroughly appreciated his fun, save his own wife and daughters, who were annoyed; so I was trying to keep him quiet, when a tall, brown-faced, handsome young man came up to me and said —

"I beg a thousand pardons; but is not your name Marston?"

I said, "Yes."

"You are a first cousin of John Marston, are you not? — of John Marston, whom I used to meet at Casterton?"

I said, "Yes; that John Marston was my cousin." But I couldn't remember my man, for all that.

"You don't remember me! I met you once at old Captain Archer's, at Lashbrook, for ten minutes. My wife has come here to buy fal-lals for Charles Ravenshoe's wedding. He is going to marry my cousin. My name is George Corby. I have married Miss Ellen Blockstrop, daughter of Admiral Blockstrop. Her eldest sister married young Captain Archer of the merchant service."

I felt very faint, but I congratulated him. The way those Australians do business shames us old-country folk. To get over a heavy disappointment and be married in two months and a week is very creditable.

"We bushmen are rough fellows," he said. (His manners were really charming. I never saw them beaten.) "But you old-country fellows must excuse us. Will you give me the pleasure of your acquaintance? I am sure

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you must be a good fellow, for your cousin is one of the best fellows I ever knew."

"I should be delighted." And I spoke the truth.

"I will introduce you to my wife directly," he said; "but the fact is, she is just now having a row with Madame Tulle, the milliner here. My wife is a deuced economical woman, and she wants to show at the Ravenshoe wedding in a white moiré-antique, which will only cost fifty guineas, and which she says will do for an evening dress in Australia afterwards. And the Frenchwoman won't let her have it for the purpose, because she says it is incorrect. And I hope to Gad the Frenchwoman will win, because my wife will get quite as good a gown to look at for twenty guineas or so."

Squire Humby begged to be introduced. Which I did.

"I am glad, sir," he said, "that my daughters have not heard your conversation. It would have demoralized them, sir, for the rest of their lives. I hope they have not heard the argument about the fifty-guinea gown. If they have, I am a ruined man. It was one of you Australians who gave twelve hundred guineas for the bull 'Master Butterfly,' the day before yesterday?"

"Well, yes," said George Corby, "I bought the bull. He'll pay, sir, handsomely, in our part of the world."

"The devil he will," said Squire Humby. "You don't know an opening for a young man of sixty-five, with a blue coat and brass buttons, who understands his business, in your part of the country, do you?"

And so on. The weddings took place at St. Peter's, Eaton Square. If the ghost of the little shoeblack had been hovering round the wall where he had played fives with the brass button, he might have almost heard the ceremony performed. Mary and Charles were not a handsome couple. The enthusiasm of the population was reserved for William and Jane Evans, who certainly were. It is my nature to be a Jack-of-all-trades, and so I was entrusted with old Master Evans, Jane's father, a magnifi-

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cent old sea-king, whom we have met before. We two preferred to go to church quietly before the others, and he, refusing to go into a pew, found himself a place in the free seats, and made himself comfortable. So I went out into the porch, and waited till they came.

I waited till the procession had gone in, and then I found that the tail of it was composed of poor Lord Charles Herries' children, Gus, Flora, and Archy, with their nurse.

If a bachelor is worth his salt, he will make himself useful. I saw that nurse was in distress and anxious, so I stayed with her.

Archy was really as good as gold till he met with his accident. He walked up the steps with nurse as quiet as possible. But even at first I began to get anxious about Gus and Flora. They were excited. Gus wouldn't walk up the steps; but he put his two heels together, and jumped up them one at a time, and Flora walked backwards, looking at him sarcastically. At the top step but one Gus stumbled; whereupon Flora said, "Goozlemy, goozelemy, goozelemy."

And Gus said, "You wait a minute, my lady, till we get into church," after which awful speech I felt as if I was smoking in a powder magazine.

I was put into a pew with Gus, and Flora, and Archy. Nurse, in her modesty, went into the pew behind us.

I am sorry to say that these dear children, with whom I had had no previous acquaintance, were very naughty. The ceremony began by Archy getting too near the edge of his hassock, falling off, pitching against the pew door, bursting it open, and flying out among the free seats, head foremost. Nurse, a nimble and dexterous woman, dashed out, and caught him up, and actually got him out of the church door before he had time to fetch his breath for a scream. Gus and Flora were left alone with me.

Flora had a great scarlet and gold church service. As soon as she opened it, she disconcerted me by saying aloud, to an imaginary female friend, "My dear, there is

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going to be a collection ; and I have left my purse on the piano."

At this time, also, Gus, seeing that the business was well begun, removed to the further end of the pew, sat down on the hassock, and took from his trousers' pocket a large tin trumpet.

I broke out all over in a cold perspiration as I looked at him. He saw my distress, and putting it to his lips, puffed out his cheeks. Flora administered comfort to me. She said, " You are looking at that foolish boy. Perhaps he won't blow it, after all. He may'nt if you don't look at him. At all events, he probably won't blow it till the organ begins ; and then it won't matter so much."

Matters were so hopeless with me that I looked at old Master Evans. He had bent down his head on to the rail of the bench before him. His beautiful daughter had been his only companion at home for many years, for his wife had died when Jane was a little bare-legged thing, who paddled in the surf. It had been a rise in life for her to marry Mr. Charles Ravenshoe's favourite pad-groom. And just now she had walked calmly and quietly up the aisle, and had stopped when she came to where he sat, and had pushed the Honiton-lace veil from her forehead, and kissed his dear old cheek : and she would walk back directly as Mrs. William Ravenshoe. And so the noble old privateer skipper had bent down, and there was nothing to be seen there, but a grey head and broad shoulders, which seemed to shake.

And so I looked up to the east end. And I saw the two couples kneeling before the clergyman. And when I, knowing everything as I did, saw Charles kneeling beside Mary Corby, with Lord Ascot, great burly, brutal giant, standing behind him, I said something which is not in the marriage service of the Church of England. After it all, to see him and her kneeling so quietly there together ! We were all happy enough that day. But I don't think that any one was much happier than I. For I knew more

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than any one. And also, three months from that time, I married my present wife, Eliza Humby. And the affair had only been arranged two days. So I was in good spirits.

At least I should have been, if it had not been for Lord Charles Herries' children. I wish those dear children (not meaning them any harm) had been, to put it mildly, at play on the village green, that blessed day.

When I looked at Gus again, he was still on the hassock, threatening propriety with his trumpet. I hoped for the best. Flora had her prayer-book open, and was playing the piano on each side of it, with her fingers. After a time she looked up at me, and said out loud —

"I suppose you have heard that Archy's cat has kitteden?"

I said, "No."

"Oh, yes, it has," she said. "Archy harnessed it to his meal cart, which turns a mill, and plays music when the wheels go round; and it ran downstairs with the cart; and we heard the music playing as it went; and it kitteden in the wood-basket immediately afterwards; and Alwright says she don't wonder at it; and no more do I; and the steward's-room boy is going to drown some. But you mustn't tell Archy, because, if you do, he won't say his prayers; and if he don't say his prayers, he will, &c. &c." Very emphatically, and in a loud tone of voice.

This was very charming. If I could only answer for Gus, and keep Flora busy, it was wildly possible that we might pull through. If I had not been a madman, I should have noticed that Gus had disappeared.

He had. And the pew door had never opened, and I was utterly unconscious. Gus had crawled up, on all fours, under the seat of the pew, until he was opposite the calves of his sister's legs, against which calves, *horresco referens*, he put his trumpet and blew a long shrill blast. Flora behaved very well and courageously. She only gave one long, wild shriek, as from a lunatic in the padded

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cell in Bedlam, and then, hurling her prayer-book at him, she turned round and tried to kick him in the face.

This was the culminating point of my misfortunes. After this, they behaved better. I represented to them that every one was just coming out of the vestry, and that they had better fight it out in the carriage, going home. Gus only made an impertinent remark about Flora's garters, and Flora only drew a short, but trenchant, historical parallel between Gus and Judas Iscariot; when the brides and bridegrooms came down the aisle, and we all drove off to Charles's house in Eaton Square.

And so, for the first time, I saw altogether, with my own eyes, the principal characters in this story. Only one was absent. Lord Saltire. I had seen him twice in my life, and once had the honour of a conversation with him. He was a man about five feet eleven, very broad shouldered, and with a very deep chest. As far as the animal part of him went, I came to the conclusion, from close and interested examination for twenty minutes, that he had, fifty or sixty years before, been a man with whom it would have been pleasanter to argue than to box. His make was magnificent. Phrenologically speaking, he had a very high square head, very flat at the sides: and, when I saw him, when he was nearly eighty, he was the handsomest old man I had ever seen. He had a florid, pure complexion. His face was without a wrinkle. His eyebrows were black, and his hair seemed to refuse to be grey. There was as much black as grey in it to the last. His eye was most extraordinary — a deep blue-grey. I can look a man as straight in the face as any one; but when Lord Saltire turned those eyes on me three or four times in the course of our interview, I felt that it was an effort to meet them. I felt that I was in the presence of a man of superior vitality to my own. We were having a talk about matters connected with Charles Ravenshoe, which I have not mentioned, because I want to keep myself, William Marston, as much out of this story as possi-

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ble. And whenever this terrible old man looked at me, asking a question, I felt my eyebrows drawing together, and knew that I was looking *defiantly* at him. He was the most extraordinary man I ever met. He never took office after he was forty. He played with politics. He was in heart, I believe (no one knows), an advanced Whig. He chose to call himself Tory. He played the Radical game very deep, early in life, and, I think, he got disgusted with party politics. The last thing the old Radical atheist did in public life was to rally up to the side of the Duke in opposition to the Reform Bill. And another fact about him is, that he had always a strong personal affection for Sir Francis.

He was a man of contradictions, if one judges a man by Whig and Tory rules ; but he was a great loss to the public business of the country. He might have done almost anything in public life with his calm clear brain. My cousin John thinks that Lord Barkham's death was the cause of his retirement.

So much about Lord Saltire. Of the other characters mentioned in this story, I will speak at once, just as I saw them sitting round the table at Charles and William Ravenshoe's wedding.

I sat beside Eliza Humby. She was infinitely the most beautiful, clever, and amiable being that the world ever produced. (But that is my business, not yours.) Charles Ravenshoe sat at the head of the table, and I will leave him alone for a minute. I will give you my impressions of the other characters in this story, as they appeared to me.

Mary was a very charming-looking little person indeed, very short, and with small features. I had never seen her before, and had never heard any one say that she was pretty. I thought her very pretty indeed.

Jane Evans was an exceedingly beautiful Devonshire girl. My eye did not rest very long on her. It came down the table to William, and there it stopped.

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I got Elizabeth Humby to speak to him, and engage him in conversation while I looked at him. I wanted to see whether there was anything remarkable in his face, for a more remarkable instance of disinterested goodwill than his determining to find Charles and ruin himself, I never happened to have heard of.

Well, he was very handsome and pleasing, with a square determined look about the mouth, such as men brought up among horses generally have. But I couldn't understand it, and so I spoke to him across Lizzie, and I said, casting good manners to the winds, "I should think that the only thing you regretted to-day was, that you had not been alongside of Charles at Balaclava;" and then I understood it, for when I mentioned Charles and Balaclava, I saw for one instant not a groom but a poet. Although, being a respectable and well-conducted man, he has never written any poetry, and probably never will.

Then I looked across the table at Lady Ascot. They say that she was never handsome. I can quite believe that. She was a beautiful old woman certainly, but then all old women are beautiful. Her face was very square, and one could see that it was capable of very violent passion; or could, knowing what one did, guess so. Otherwise there was nothing very remarkable about her, except that she was a remarkably charming old lady. She was talking to General Mainwaring, who was a noble-looking old soldier.

Nothing more. In fact, the whole group were less remarkable and tragical-looking than I thought they would have been. I was disappointed, until I came to Lord Ascot, and then I could not take my eyes off him.

There was tragedy enough there. There was coarse brutality and passion enough, in all conscience. And yet that man had done what he had done. Here was a puzzle with a vengeance.

Lord Ascot, as I saw him now, for the first time, was simply a low-bred and repulsive-looking man. In stature

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he was gigantic, in every respect save height. He was about five feet nine, very deep about the chest. His hair was rather dark, cut close. His face was very florid, and perfectly hairless. His forehead was low. His eyes were small, and close together. His eyebrows were heavy, and met over his nose, which was short and square. His mouth was large; and when you came to his mouth, you came to the first tolerable feature in his face. When he was speaking to no one in particular, the under lip was set, and the whole face, I am very sorry to say, was the sort of face which is quite as often seen in the dock, as in the witness-box (unless some gentleman has turned Queen's evidence). And this was the man who had risked a duke's fortune, because "There were some things a fellow couldn't do, you know."

It was very puzzling till he began to speak to his grandmother, and then his lower lip pouted out, his eyebrows raised, his eyes went apart, and he looked a different man. Is it possible that if he had not been brought up to cock-fighting and horse-racing, among prize-fighters and jockeys, that he might have been a different man? I can't say, I am sure.

Lord and Lady Hainault were simply a very high-bred, very handsome, and very charming pair of people. I never had the slightest personal acquaintance with either of them. My cousin knows them both very intimately, and he says there are not two better people in the world.

Charles Ravenshoe rose to reply to General Mainwaring's speech, proposing the brides and bridegrooms, and I looked at him very curiously. He was pale, from his recent illness, and he never was handsome. But his face was the face of a man, whom I should fancy most people would get very fond of. When we were schoolfellows at Shrewsbury, he was a tall dark-haired boy, who was always laughing, and kicking up a row, and giving his things away to other fellows. Now he was a tall, dark, melancholy-looking man, with great eyes, and lofty eyebrows.

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His vivacity, and that carriage which comes from the possession of great physical strength, were gone ; and while I looked at him, I felt ten years older. Why should I try to describe him further ? He is not so remarkable a man as either Lord Ascot or William. But he was the best man I ever knew.

He said a few kind hearty words and sat down, and then Lord Ascot got up. And I took hold of Lizzie's hand with my left ; and I put my right elbow on the table and watched him intensely, with my hand shading my face. He had a coat buttoned over his great chest, and as he spoke he kept on buttoning and unbuttoning it with his great coarse hand. He said —

"I ain't much hand at this sort of thing. I suppose those two Marstons, confound them, are saying to themselves that I ought to be, because I am in the House of Lords. That John Marston is a most impudent beggar, and I shall expect to see his friend to-morrow morning. He always was, you know. He has thwarted me all through my life. I wanted Charles Ravenshoe to go to the deuce, and I'll be hanged if he'd let him. And it is not to be borne."

There was a general laugh at this, and Lord Ascot stretched his hand across General Mainwaring, and shook hands with my cousin.

"You men just go out of the room, will you?" (the servants departed, and Lord Ascot went to the door to see they were not listening. I thought some revelation was coming, but I was mistaken). "You see I am obliged to notice strangers, because a fellow may say things among old friends which he don't exactly care to before servants.

"It is all very well to say I'm a fool. That is very likely, and may be taken for granted. But I am not such a fool as not to know that a very strong prejudice exists against me in the present society."

Every one cried out, "No ! no !" Of all the great wedding breakfasts that season, this was certainly the

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most remarkable. Lord Ascot went on. He was getting the savage look on his face now.

"Well, well! let that pass. Look at that man at the head of the table — the bridegroom. Look at him. You wonder that I did what I did. I'll tell you why. I love that fellow. He is what I call a man, General Mainwaring. I met that fellow at Twyford years ago, and he has always been the same to me since. You say I served him badly once. That is true enough. You insulted me once in public about it, Hainault. You were quite right. Say you, I should not talk about it to-day. But when we come to think how near death's gates some of us have been since then, you will allow that this wedding-day has something very solemn about it.

"My poor wife has broken her back across that infernal gate, and so she could not come. I must ask you all to think kindly of that wife of mine. You have all been very kind to her since her awful accident. She has asked me to thank you.

"I rose to propose a toast, and I have been carried away by a personal statement, which, at every other wedding breakfast I ever heard of, it would be a breach of good manners to make. It is not so on this occasion. Terrible things have befallen every one of us here present. And I suppose we must try all of us to — hey! — to — hah! — well, to do better in future.

"I rose, I said, to propose a toast. I rose to propose the most blameless and excellent woman I ever knew. I propose that we drink the health of my grandmother, Lady Ascot."

And oh! but we leapt to our feet and drank it. Manners to the winds, after what we had gone through. There was that solemn creature, Lord Hainault, with his champagne glass in his hand, behaving like a schoolboy, and giving us the time. And then, when her dear grey head was bent down over the table, buried in her hands, my present father-in-law, Squire Humby, leapt to his feet

An End of the Business

like a young giant, and called out for three times three for Lord Ascot. And we had breath enough left to do that handsomely, I warrant you. The whole thing was incorrect in the highest degree, but we did it. And I don't know that any of us were ashamed of it afterwards.

And while the carriages were getting ready, Charles said, would we walk across the square. And we all came with him. And he took us to a piece of dead white wall, at the east-end of St. Peter's Church, opposite the cab-stand. And then he told us the story of the little shoeblack, and how his comical friendship for that boy had saved him from what it would not do to talk about.

* * * *

But there is a cloud on Charles Ravenshoe's face even now. I saw him last summer lying on the sand, and playing with his eldest boy. And the cloud was on him then. There was no moroseness, no hardness in the expression ; but the face was not the merry old face I knew so well at Shrewsbury and Oxford. There is a dull, settled, dreaming melancholy there still. The memory of those few terrible months has cast its shadow upon him. And the shadow will lie, I fancy, upon that forehead, and will dim those eyes, until the forehead is smoothed in the sleep of death, and the eyes have opened to look upon eternity.

Good-bye.

THE END.

